

TAUNTON'S

New "Quick & Delicious" recipe section

MARCH 2002 NO. 49

fine COOKING

FOR PEOPLE WHO LOVE TO COOK

Recipe contest:
four winning
chicken dishes

Maple-roasted
acorn squash

Tangy, buttery
lemon bars

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| 2/3 | cup packed light brown sugar |
| 4 | tablespoons butter, cut into small pieces |
| 1 | can (20 ounces) pineapple rings, drained |
| 7 to 10 | maraschino cherries |
| 1 | package (18.25 ounces) yellow cake mix |
| 1 | cup water |
| 1/4 | cup vegetable oil |
| 3 | eggs |

1. Sprinkle brown sugar over bottom of microwave-safe 10-inch round cake pan or 9" x 13" baking dish; dot with butter. Microwave* at Power Level 10 (100% power) for 1 1/2 minutes. Evenly distribute mixture; arrange pineapple rings in single layer over mixture and place a cherry in each ring.
2. Combine cake mix, water, oil, and eggs. Beat well, spoon batter into pan and microwave* at Power Level 7 (70% power) for 14 to 16 minutes.
3. Let stand for 5 minutes. Loosen with knife and carefully invert onto a platter.

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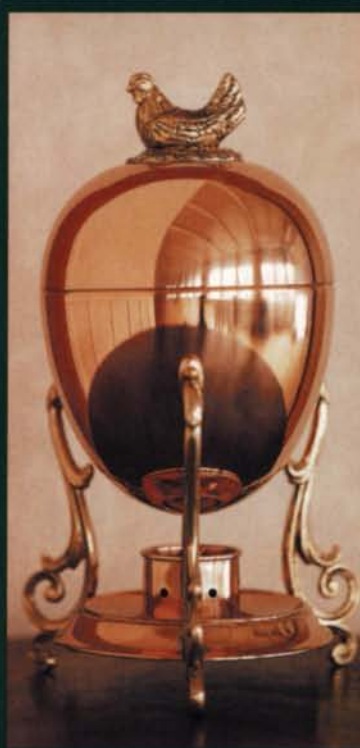
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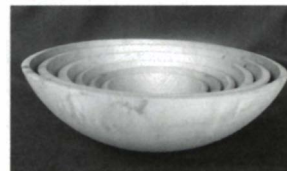
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By the time he was 27, **Tom Colicchio** ("Braising Meat," p. 56) had already received three stars from the *New York Times* for his work as chef at Mondrian. In 1994, Tom joined up with Danny Meyer to open his own restaurant in the city: the much-loved Gramercy Tavern, which earned him a James Beard award. Last year, Tom opened Craft to warm acclaim, and this year he'll open a more casual restaurant next door. *Think Like a Chef*, his first book, was published two years ago. Tom's collaborator, **Catherine Young**, is a lawyer-turned-food writer. She cooked at several top-notch New York restaurants and was a recipe editor at *Saveur* before going freelance. Catherine is working with Tom on his next book.

Despite getting a degree in filmmaking, **Evan Kleiman** ("Easy Pizza Dough," p. 36) realized early on that cooking—especially rustic Italian food—was her true passion. After taking her first professional cooking job at Mangia restaurant in Los Angeles, she never looked back, becoming executive chef at Verdi Restaurant di Musica in Santa Monica, and opening her own restaurant in 1984. Today, when she's not running the very popular Angeli Caffé, or hosting her weekly radio show, "Good Food," on KCRW (the second largest NPR station in the country), she's travelling to Italy to teach classes, conduct tours, or to do research for one of her books, *Cucina Fresca*, *Pasta Fresca*, *Cucina Rustica*, *Cucina del Mare*, and *Angeli Caffé's Pizza, Pasta & Panini*.

Susie Middleton,

executive editor of *Fine Cooking*, never met a vegetable she didn't like. "Roasted Acorn Squash" (p. 40) is a follow-up to "Fresh Vegetables Get Great Flavor Fast" (*Fine Cooking* #45), "Winter Blues? Turn to Hearty Greens" (*Fine Cooking* #42), and "Summer Vegetable Gratin" (*Fine Cooking* #33).



Blue cheese fanatic Aliza Green

("Cooking with Blue Cheese," p. 42) is also a chef, a food stylist, a food consultant, a newspaper columnist, a culinary arts instructor, the author of *The Bean Bible: A Legumaniac's Guide to Lentils, Peas & Every Edible Bean on the Planet*, and the co-author of *Georges Perrier: Le Bec-Fin Recipes and iCeviche!* She lives outside of Philadelphia with her husband and two children.



Joanne Chang ("Best-Selling Lemon Bars," p. 53) graduated from Harvard with a degree in applied mathematics and economics, started a career as a management consultant, and then decided she'd rather be cooking. She began at Boston's Biba restaurant, became pastry chef at Rialto in Cambridge, and then was hired by Payard Pâtisserie in New York City. She returned to Boston to open her



own bakery, Flour, whose loyal, lemon-bar-crazy customers keep coming back for more.

Tony Rosenfeld was working as a regular contributor to the *Boston Globe's* food section and moonlighting as a line cook at Boston's esteemed L'Espalier restaurant when he wrote this issue's article on slow-cooked garlic (p. 62). We were so impressed with his writing skills and food knowledge that we've since snatched him up as *Fine Cooking's* new assistant editor. Before spending six months in Italy as a culinary apprentice to Giuliano Bugialli in Tuscany and at the Roman restaurant Bastianelli al Molo, Tony studied and worked in Spain.



Michele Anna Jordan ("The Power of Salt," p. 65) has written thirteen books to date, including *Salt & Pepper* and *The New Cook's Tour of Sonoma*. She has won numerous awards for both cooking and writing, including a James Beard award and a Small Press Cookbook of the Year award. She is currently at work on three new books, including *Learning to Taste*, a memoir of her father. She lives in Sonoma County, California.

Carole Bloom


studied pastry and confectionery arts in Europe, where she also worked as an assistant pastry chef at the Beau Rivage Palace Hotel in Lausanne, Switzerland. She fell in love with giandua ("Hazelnuts & Chocolate," p. 68) after taking her first bite of it while living in Italy. Carole lives in San Diego now and is the author of six cookbooks. Her latest is *Cookies For Dummies*. One of her other books, *All About Chocolate*, won the award for Best Chocolate Book at Eurochocolate in 1999.



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LETTERS

Here's the place to share your thoughts on our recent articles or your food and cooking philosophies. Send your comments to Letters, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com.

FROM THE EDITOR

You may have noticed that this issue feels slightly thicker, due to our first Quick & Delicious pullout. To date, we've featured one Quick & Delicious recipe per issue (always on the back page), which focuses on speed and flavor rather than learning about a new technique, because we know that even the most dedicated cook has time constraints.

Your response to the one recipe has been enthusiastic, so we've expanded Quick & Delicious to include eight recipes in an effort to fully satisfy the broad range of your cooking needs.

This issue also contains four more special recipes—the winners from our reader recipe contest (starting on p. 48). They're all chicken (that was the theme of the contest) and all very creative and delicious.

And you've been doing your own voting on some other chicken recipes—the three from the first part of our series "Three Methods for..." (*Fine Cooking* #47, p. 52). Based on our highly unscientific sampling, Stephan Pyles's Butterflied Roast Chicken with Chile-Cinnamon Rub is the most popular. But Tom Douglas and Daniel Boulud needn't feel slighted—they had some very passionate fans as well. As you continue to make these great variations of one of the world's great dishes (do you agree?), let us know what you think.

—Martha Holmberg, editor-in-chief

Good science makes a good steak

I have subscribed to *Fine Cooking* for several years, and my family is very pleased with the results. I love the recipes, but as a high school chemistry teacher, I have to respond to the letter that corrected your statements about why cast iron is good for cooking steak (*Fine Cooking* #48, p. 12). In trying to correct the reason for the success of cast-iron skillets, the reader stated that cast-iron is a poor conductor of heat and that is the reason it heats slowly and retains its heat.

Actually, the reader and the author of the original article are both partially correct, but the reader was incorrect in one very important fact. Cast iron is in fact a pretty good conductor (defined as the ability to transfer heat), but what makes it able to retain its heat is its high specific heat. Specific heat is a physical



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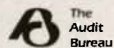
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February 2-3: *Fine Cooking* joins the festivities at the **Boston Wine Expo** in the World Trade Center Boston. Special events include celebrity chef demonstrations, seminars, a vintner's dinner, and the opportunity to sample fine wines from around the world. Stop by our booth and chat with the editors. For more, visit www.wine-expos.com or call 877/946-3976.

February 8-10: We're back in **Boston** and the World Trade Center for the **Boston Cooks! Cooking & Culinary Expo**. The focus of this show is the kitchen as the heart of the home. Everything from cooktops to cookware to cookbooks and the latest kitchen gadgets will be on display. There'll be demonstrations by celebrity chefs, cookbook signings, and seminars on kitchen design. For more details, go to www.bostoncooks.com.

February 8-10: While some of our editors are in Boston this weekend, others will be at the **Twin Cities Food & Wine Experience** at the **Minneapolis Convention Center**. The show features cooking and wine seminars, wine tastings, cooking demonstrations, and exhibits of gourmet food and cooking equipment. For details, go to www.foodwineshow.com.

February 18, 19, 20: Contributing editor Molly Stevens teaches cooking classes at **Dierberg's Markets** in the **St. Louis area**: February 18 at West Oak;

February 19 at Clarkson and South Roads, and February 20 at Mad Rivers. Details are available from the individual stores.

March 17: Editor-in-chief Martha Holmberg gives a cooking demonstration, and senior editor Amy Albert joins contributing editor Tim Gaiser for a cheese and wine pairing seminar at the **Dallas Wine & Food Festival**. There will also be wine and food tastings, and book signings by wine and cookbook authors. The event is held at The Fairmont Hotel in the Dallas Arts District. Details are available at 214/741-6884 or dallaswinefestival.com.

January through May: *Fine Cooking* is a principle sponsor of cooking classes at De Gustibus Cooking School at Macy's Herald Square in **New York City**. Call 212/439-1714 or visit <http://starchefs.com/DeGustibus/> for a class schedule. *Fine Cooking* is also a partner with Ramekins Sonoma Valley Culinary School in **Sonoma, California**. Visit www.ramekins.com or call 707/933-0450 for details and a schedule of classes.

property that describes a substance's ability to transfer its stored heat to water (the ability to heat one gram of water one degree Celsius).

Therefore, the higher the specific heat of a substance, the longer it will retain its heating ability. Iron is a good conductor, but what makes it work so well for searing is the fact that it also has a high specific heat.

—Lisa Bertram,
Castro Valley, CA

Making good potatoes even better

I much enjoyed Martha Holmberg's article on rösti potatoes (*Fine Cooking* #48, p. 50). Although the name is new to me, the recipe is one my oldest favorites.

I agree with her that Yukon Gold and Russet are good choices. While a coarse grater is good, a fine julienne (2 or 3mm) is better. The real trick is to place the grated or julienned potatoes in a colander and rinse them for a few minutes in very hot tap water. When they start to feel waxy, they are ready to have the water pressed out of them. This step eliminates gooeyness, creating an end product that is crisp on the outside and delicate and moist on the inside. Before we knew any better, we always fried them in bacon grease, but sensible heads prevail now and vegetable oil is the routine.

—Donald Tschirhart,
South Pasadena, CA

Too much java in my mocha

The mocha cinnamon chocolate-chip cookies in *Fine Cooking* #48 (p. 74) looked great and sounded great. I followed the recipe carefully, but came out with cookies that were quite a bit darker than what is in your picture and tasted so strongly of coffee/espresso that the cinnamon and chocolate flavors were all but lost. Three tablespoons is a lot of instant espresso powder. Assuming that author Annie Giammattei meant tablespoons and not teaspoons, it would seem that the brand is everything with this ingredient. My brand (Ferrara, labeled "instant espresso" without specifying powder or granules) was not, apparently, comparable to Medaglia D'Oro. Perhaps this ingredient should be quantified in terms of the amount required to make a demitasse of espresso. For Ferrara, one



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rounded teaspoon is called for. For Medaglia D'Oro?

—Libby Barlow, via e-mail

Editors' reply: We've heard from several readers that their cookies were darker, and in fact ours were, too—it seems that the sunny lighting in the photo on p. 75 made the cookies look lighter than their true rich brown color. As for the question about the coffee measurements, three tablespoons instant espresso or four tablespoons instant coffee granules, crushed, is correct. After hearing from Libby Barlow and others, we retested the cookies with several brands of both types of coffee and got tasty results with every batch. We suspect that some bakers might have mistakenly used "rounded" tablespoons, which would account for too much coffee flavor, or if using instant coffee, may have crushed the granules before measuring, rather than after as indicated in the recipe. Annie also reminded us that, as she said in the article, the height and texture of the cookies can vary from batch

to batch, but to achieve a thin, crisp cookie, be sure your butter is soft and that you don't overmeasure your flour.

Waffle perfection

I should have written you after I tried the Pineapple Upside-Down Cake you published in *Fine Cooking* #19 (p. 59). It was wonderful, and I still make and enjoy it.

I've been making the sour cream waffles published by Margaret Fox in her *Cafe Beaujolais* cookbook for 15 to 20 years. They are for me far and away the best-tasting waffles ever; however, they tended to become limp when stored.

After reading the waffle article in *Fine Cooking* #47 (p. 62), I made a batch of these sour cream waffles using three of Pan Anderson's suggestions: 25% cornstarch, adding the sugar to the egg whites, and baking off at 200°F for five minutes. I spent the rest of the afternoon waxing so enthusiastically that my son (age 40) asked, "So you can die now?"

Perfection is subjective, of course. The following week, although I still had

waffles from the first batch in the freezer, I made another batch using potato starch instead of cornstarch. Now, that is perfection: taste, tenderness, and crispness. I'm glad I didn't die after the first batch.

—Su Conahan, Portland, OR


We Chinese cooks haven't lost our "roots"

In "The 'Big Four' Flavors of Thailand" (*Fine Cooking* #47, p. 30), the author states that cilantro (fresh coriander) roots "have all but disappeared from Chinese cooking." I'm a Chinese American, and I know that statement isn't true. In southern Chinese cooking—for example, Kuantong, Hong Kong, or Taiwanese styles—cilantro roots definitely play a role in their kitchens, not only for dressing a bowl of soup, but also for their flavor. I even called and confirmed my thought with several friends who are also Chinese Americans. One even told me that her father will not touch his soup if there's no cilantro root in it!

—Joyce Lee, via e-mail ♦

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Have a question of general interest about cooking? Send it to Q&A, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or by e-mail to fc@taunton.com, and we'll find a cooking professional with the answer.

Caring for cast iron

I recently bought a cast-iron pan. I cured it as the instructions said to do, but can you tell me more about how to best care for it?

—Tina Lujan,
Colorado Springs, CO

Mara Reid Rogers replies:

With proper care, your cast-iron pan will last for decades, so you've started down the right path by seasoning (curing) it as directed by the manufacturer. Periodically you'll

causing degradation of the pan's surface and giving the food a metallic flavor or off color. Never marinate foods in cast iron for the same reason.

When you remove the pan from the heat, don't leave hot foods covered in the pan—the steam can diminish the seasoning on the pan's interior.

Always clean, wash, dry, and rub your pan with oil immediately after each use. Many people never let their cast-iron piece come into contact with soap because it removes some of the seasoning; they simply rub it clean with salt, and then rinse and dry it. I think it's fine to use a mild dishwashing liquid and water to clean the pan

the pan cool down inside. Once cool, rub it with a very thin layer of vegetable oil or shortening. Lay a paper towel flat on the inside of the pan to absorb any moisture or excess oil and to help prevent rust. Store it in a dry place, uncovered so that moisture won't collect inside.

Mara Reid Rogers is the author of *Cooking in Cast Iron* (HP Books).

Duck, the other red meat

Why do many recipes call for duck breast to be served when it is still pink inside?

Is salmonella not a threat as it is with undercooked chicken?

—Barbara Boghosian,
via e-mail

Todd Applegate replies:

Duck farmers and processors go to great lengths to ensure that their products are relatively free of salmonella, but like any other meat, there's always a chance that duck meat might harbor pathogenic microorganisms, including salmonella. In order to be 100% safe, duck should be cooked to 160°F, the temperature at which salmonella and most other pathogens are killed. If the duck is removed from the heat at about 155°F, carryover cooking causes the final temperature to rise to 160°F.

Unlike chicken breast, duck breast is a red meat. And like other red meats, duck breast cooked to 160°F (medium doneness) will still have a slightly pink interior. Duck breast cooked rare (135°F) to medium rare (145°F) isn't guaranteed safe, but some people prefer the flavor and texture of duck breast at these degrees of doneness and feel that the experience of eating



want to reseason it using the same method to keep the pan in good shape.

You should use your pan often, because it's actually the cooking process that perfects the surface; over time, the pan will develop a beautiful, deep black, shiny patina and become practically nonstick. The first few times you use the pan, cook foods that are high in fat, such as sausage or bacon. Avoid foods with a high water content at first.

Don't cook acidic foods, like tomatoes or wine, in your pan. They react with the iron,

as long as you dry and store it properly. Whether you use soap or not, don't clean cast-iron cookware with abrasive detergents, metal scouring pads, or metal brushes. Instead, use a stiff, nonmetal scouring pad or brush to remove any stubborn food particles. Never soak cast-iron cookware in water or any other liquid, and never wash it in the dishwasher.

Don't allow cast-iron cookware to air dry because it will rust. Dry it in a warm (300°F) oven for about 20 minutes, then turn off the oven and let

rare duck is worth the slight risk that it may pose. Todd Applegate, PhD., is an assistant professor and poultry extension specialist in the Department of Animal Sciences at Purdue University.

Getting the truest thermometer reading

How far should an instant-read thermometer be pushed into a piece of food to get the most accurate reading?

—Darlene Etter, Indianapolis, IN

Judy McKay replies: It depends on whether your thermometer is digital or bi-metal (analog). The temperature sensor in digital thermometers, as well as in digital thermometer forks and probes, is located in the first ¼ inch of the tip. Bi-metal thermometers have a longer sensor that extends about 1 to 2 inches up from the bottom of the stem. A dimple in the side of the stem usually marks the point to which the thermometer should be inserted.

To get the most accurate reading, put the thermometer in the thickest part of the food and make sure that the entire sensor area has been pushed into the food. Because digital thermometers only need to go in about ¼ inch, they offer an advantage when taking the temperature of thin or small pieces of food.

Bi-metal instant-read thermometers may occasionally need to be recalibrated to maintain accuracy. Check your thermometer by sticking it into either boiling water or ice water for a minute. If you're near sea level, the boiling water should read about 212°F, and the ice water

should read about 33°F. A couple of degrees on either side won't matter too much, but if the thermometer appears to be really off, you can adjust it. Find the nut where the stem enters the bottom of the thermometer face and use a pair of pliers to turn the nut until the thermometer reads correctly.

Judy McKay works for Component Design Northwest, a manufacturer of temperature-sensing equipment.

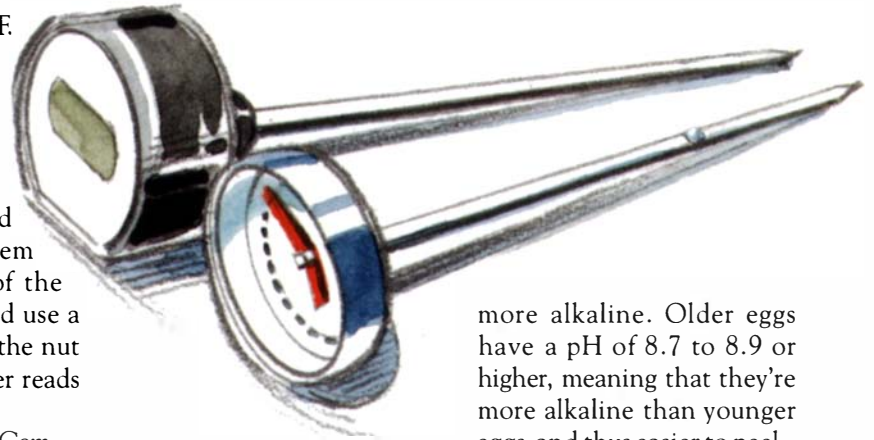
A.k.a. rice wine vinegar

What's the difference between rice vinegar and rice wine vinegar?

—Aaron Levitch, via e-mail

Molly Stevens replies: Although both terms appear in recipes and food writing, rice vinegar and rice wine vinegar are exactly the same thing. Like all vinegar, rice vinegar is a product of a double fermentation: First some type of alcohol must be produced (in this case, rice wine), and then bacteria are introduced to oxidize the alcohol into a mild acetic acid—the acid common to all vinegars.

Rice vinegar has a mild, almost sweet taste because it contains about 4% to 5% acidity, while most other vinegars weigh in at 5% to 7%. While we most commonly see the pale, golden-colored rice vinegar on market shelves, there are also black and red versions that have been blended with sugar and spices. Sushi vinegar, also called seasoned rice vinegar, is a white rice vinegar that has been seasoned with sugar and



salt. Don't substitute it for plain rice vinegar.

Just as wine vinegars vary in quality according to brand, so do rice vinegars. Shop around to find one that you like. If rice vinegar is unavailable in your area, the closest substitute for it is cider vinegar diluted with a bit of water. Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*.

Easy-peel hard-cooked eggs

Why are hard-cooked eggs sometimes so difficult to peel? I make them every day, and most batches are a snap to peel, but others are so tricky that I lose half the egg.

—Sheryl Allen, via e-mail

Shirley Corriher replies: When it comes to cooking eggs, the usual rule is that the fresher, the better, but hard-cooked (hard-boiled) eggs are the exception to this rule. Researchers have found that the greatest factor affecting the ease of peeling is the egg's pH, a measure of acid and alkaline levels. As an egg ages, carbon dioxide that was dissolved in the egg white seeps out through pores in the shell, and oxygen and other gases in the air seep in. This loss of carbon dioxide makes the egg

more alkaline. Older eggs have a pH of 8.7 to 8.9 or higher, meaning that they're more alkaline than younger eggs, and thus easier to peel.

To protect this high level of alkalinity when making hard-cooked eggs, don't add vinegar to the water, as some cookbooks suggest. A little salt is fine, though, because if the shell cracks during cooking, the salt makes the egg white coagulate faster and seal the crack. Avoid overcooking the eggs, as this increases the chance that an ugly green ring will form around the yolk.

Here's my method for perfectly hard-cooked eggs: Put the eggs in a saucepan large enough to hold them in a single layer and add a pinch of salt and enough cold water to cover by 1½ inches. Cover the pan partially, bring to a rolling boil, and then turn the heat down to low, cover fully, and cook for 30 seconds. Remove the pan from the heat and let stand, covered, for 15 minutes. Drain and rinse the eggs under cold running water for 5 minutes (rapid cooling also helps a little with peeling and with green ring prevention) and then peel. You can refrigerate the hard-cooked eggs in their shells for a few days, but the sooner you peel them, the easier it will be. Food scientist Shirley Corriher is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ♦

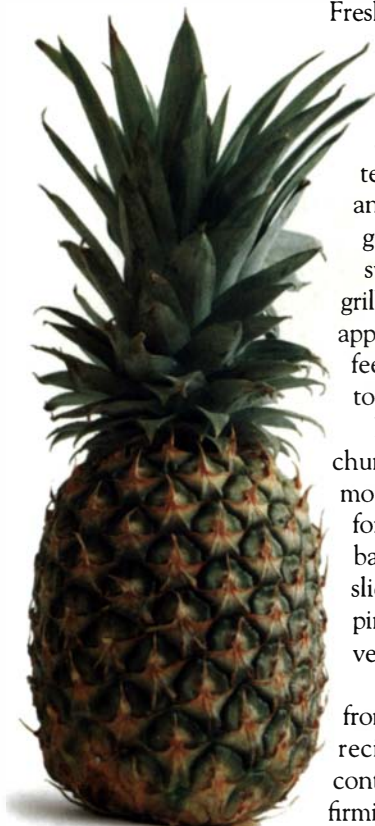
BY AMY ALBERT

With pineapple, fragrance is key

Fresh pineapple's tropical aroma and spunky acidity are wonderful winter pick-me-ups. Two common varieties are Golden Ripe and Hawaiian Jet. Golden Ripes should have an overall golden hue; intensely sweet, they're best for eating plain and in blender drinks. Hawaiian Jets have a greenish cast even when ripe; they're not as sweet, tend to keep longer, and are best for grilling or using in cooked desserts. Any pineapple worth eating should smell fragrant and feel very heavy for its size, with bright, crisp top leaves. Pass on fruits with soft spots.

For a yummy dessert, macerate pineapple chunks in a simple syrup infused with a cinnamon stick, star anise, and sliced ginger; before serving, toss in grapefruit segments and bananas. Or try grilling skewered chunks or sliced rings. And, of course, there's always pineapple upside-down cake; for a delicious version, see *Fine Cooking* #47, p. 85.

Fresh pineapple is obviously a world apart from canned, but do use canned or cooked in recipes containing gelatin: raw pineapple contains an enzyme that counteracts gelatin's firming action.



A ripe persimmon is soft and tender

For an exotic treat, I recommend a persimmon—that honeyed flavor and silky texture knock me out. Varieties include Fuyu (above), Sharon, and Hachiya. (Sharon persimmons are squatter, while Hachiyas are more heart-shaped.) While Fuyus and Sharons are ready to eat when slightly soft to the touch, Hachiyas aren't ripe until they feel soft and almost mushy. All underripe persimmons will make your mouth pucker; they're astringently tannic. Hasten ripening by stashing them in a paper bag with a ripe banana and leaving it on the counter for a day or two.

To eat a very soft persimmon, slice it open, scrape the pulp from the skin, and eat it with a spoon. If the fruit is firm enough to cut into slices, peel and serve simply, with a dollop of tangy *crème fraîche*. Or purée and strain the pulp; season it with lemon, lime, or orange juice, and freeze it into persimmon ice, or fold the purée into softly whipped cream for a persimmon fool.

Choose firm, heavy parsnips

Like many winter vegetables, the best-tasting parsnips are those dug from the ground after cold weather has set in. Look for firm parsnips that feel heavy for their size, and when peeling and slicing, cut out any woody core (which will be tough and indigestible). You can coax out a parsnip's natural sweetness in several ways. Boil or steam sliced parsnips and then toss them with salt, pepper, and good sweet butter. Simmer them with potatoes to purée into a warming

soup or a winter mash; add carrots and a bit of curry powder for a more complex dish. The dry heat of oven roasting is a great way to prepare parsnips simply and may be the best way to accentuate their natural sweetness. Roast peeled, sliced chunks along with pearl onions, or try the recipe at right, which makes a good snack, appetizer, or side dish for grilled chops—and may tempt even those who say they don't like parsnips.



Crisp Roasted Parsnips

I eat these just like fries, sprinkled with a little malt vinegar. *Serves four.*

1½ lb. parsnips, peeled
3 Tbs. olive oil
2 generous pinches cayenne
¼ tsp. salt; more to taste
2 large cloves garlic, minced

Position an oven rack on a lower-middle rung; heat the oven to 450°F. Cut the parsnips into matchsticks 2 inches long and a scant ½ inch thick, discarding any woody core. Dump the matchsticks onto a rimmed baking sheet large enough to fit them in a single layer. Sprinkle the olive oil, cayenne, and salt over all; toss to mix and coat well. Roast for 15 min., stirring once or twice. Sprinkle with the garlic, stir well, and continue roasting until the parsnips are well browned, about another 15 min. Let cool slightly, taste for salt, and serve.

Amy Albert is *Fine Cooking's* senior editor. ♦

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BY ROBERT DANHI

Customizing flavor with onions

Have you ever wondered why recipes for so many dishes begin with cooking an onion? It's because there's no ingredient quite like an onion for adding subtle sweetness and bolstering other flavors at the same time. In fact, the type of onion that's used, the way it's cut, and the way it's cooked all affect the flavor and texture of a finished dish in dramatically different ways. So if you ever set out to create a new dish or if you just want to tinker with an old favorite, pay special attention to the onion.

All onions are not equal

While leeks and scallions can play a delicious role in cooking, globe onions of all kinds—yellow, white, red, sweet—and shallots are more assertive and versatile in cooking.

Yellow onions are all-purpose onions. Since they are inexpensive and readily available, I use them more than any other type. They have the strongest flavor of all the globe onions, so they're best when cooked. They're usually my first choice for stocks and broths. Spanish onions are similar to yellow onions, but they're larger.

White onions retain their firm texture. They're a bit milder than yellow onions, so they can be eaten raw (in a salsa or on a hamburger), but they're also strong enough to hold up under heat. I especially love how white onions hold their shape and texture when they're sautéed.

Think raw when you think of red onions. Though red onions (a.k.a. Bermuda or Italian onions) are also good when they're simmered into a jam-like relish for meats, their crisp texture and sweet flavor are really at their best when eaten raw. Marinating them briefly in a vinaigrette (or other acidic bath) accentuates their bright purple color.

Sweet onions are regional specialties. Vidalias from Georgia, Maus from Hawaii, Texas Sweets, and Washington Walla Wallas are all coveted for their sweet flavor. Eat them raw in salads or grill them briefly to highlight their fantastic flavor.

Shallots are at home in sauces. On the assertiveness

scale, these mild-mannered relatives of garlic are similar to white onions, but their flavor is more refined and complex. Shallots are most often minced and added raw to a vinaigrette or cooked until sweet and used as the foundation of many classical and modern sauces.

The cut makes a difference

After you decide which onion to use, you need to consider how to cut it, as this has a dramatic effect on the final texture. If you want the onion to blend seamlessly into the dish, mince it. For a little more presence, dice it. If you want it to be unmistakable, slice it.

When slicing, I use the distinction of cutting the onion

“with the grain,” from root to blossom end, or “across the grain,” which creates rings or half moons. When you cut with the grain, the onion slices hold together during cooking and retain their shape better. Onions sliced across the grain release more moisture and lose their crispness faster. I exploit this characteristic when I make onion soup by cutting half the onions across the grain (these partially dissolve and thicken the soup) and half with the grain (these give the identifiable onion texture to the finished soup).

Avoid bruising the onion, whichever cut you choose. A food processor or dull knife used to slice or chop through an onion will rupture more of the onion's delicate cell structure, causing the release of more of its sulfur-containing amino acids. These come in contact with other enzymes in the onion, creating the sulfuric acid that makes you cry and makes the onion taste strong.

Cooking tailors flavor

There are three basic ways to cook onions: sweating, sautéing, and caramelizing.

To sweat an onion is to cook it until it's soft and translucent but hasn't begun to brown. The purpose of



Two ways to slice an onion



Cut “with the grain” for slices that hold their shape.



Cut “against the grain” for slices that soften quickly.

sweating onions is threefold: It reduces the sulfur compounds (which softens flavor), it heightens the sweetness, and it softens the texture. Sweated onions lay the groundwork for dishes like braised meats, rice pilafs or risottos, and white sauces. They lend a natural sweetness that can't be created by simply adding sugar.

Sweat onions over low heat and use only enough fat to coat the bottom of the pan. If you use significantly more fat, you'll be "smothering" the onions, a related process usually reserved for béchamel (white sauce) and other sauces that are ultimately thickened with flour-and-fat roux.

Sautéed onions are cooked until they're golden brown. They're tender, but not as soft as sweated onions. Because they have a more resilient texture and a richer, sweeter flavor due to the browning, they're great in dishes like vegetable sautés, pastas, and soups.

To sauté onions, use high heat and a minimum of fat. Heat your pan before adding enough oil or clarified butter to film the bottom of the pan and then add the onions. Don't cover the onions while you're sautéing. Covering the pan would trap steam, and the steam would keep the onions from browning.

Caramelizing onions creates a new depth of flavor. When the onions' sugars caramelize, a complex chemical process produces more than a hundred new flavor compounds. Each has a color, aroma, and taste that combine to create a unique, soulful flavor that permeates a dish unlike anything else. Caramelized onions add color and

Sweat over low heat



Cover onions while they sweat to keep them moist and to prevent browning.

Sauté over high heat



Sauté means "to jump," so stir frequently to keep the onions jumping and browning evenly.

Sweating + sautéing = caramelizing



Cover and sweat the onions until they're translucent, and then take off the lid and bump up the heat a bit. Cook without stirring until the onions on the bottom start to brown...



...and then stir occasionally until they're a deep, luscious brown. The thicker the onions, the lower the heat should be in the final stage of cooking.

depth of flavor to brown stocks, and they make a flavorful topping for pizzas, bruschetta, steaks, and chops.

If caramelization had a mantra, it would be "take your time." This is a process that doesn't happen quickly. Depending on the amount of onions, it can take upwards of an hour. But developing the

flavor slowly is worth it; rushing may get you the color but much of the flavor will still be undeveloped, and some of the onions will be simply burnt.

To caramelize onions, combine the techniques of sweating and sautéing (see the photos above). The thicker the cut of the onions, the lower the heat should be in the

final stage of caramelizing. If the onions ever start to look dry and appear to be browning too fast, stir in a little water to moisten them and to dissolve the sugars that are burning.

Robert Danhi is a chef-instructor at The Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, New York. ♦

BY LESLIE REVSIN

A passion for paprika

A passion for paprika ignited in me during a recent trip to Spain. As I wandered through the pepper fields in La Vera, a district in the remote western part of the country, I could see and smell something happening in the long, rustic farm sheds ahead of me, where aromatic wisps of smoke curled from the rooftops. Harvest time had just ended, and I could spy a few small red peppers still peeking from the low foliage. I followed my nose and entered one of the sheds. In front of me sat huge mounds of crimson peppers. Below the peppers, smoldering oak logs sent heat and smoke up through a slatted floor. This age-old process would go on for ten days or more until the peppers, dried and infused with strong, smoky flavor, would be pulverized between millstones to become the glorious, rusty-red spice called *pimentón*.

Until that fateful day, I had counted myself a solid, though lust-free, fan of genuine Hungarian paprika (and a serious disdainer of the typical supermarket stuff, which can be relatively tasteless). Now, both Hungarian and Spanish paprikas hold unshakable positions in my pantry.

All paprikas derive from the same family of peppers, *Capsicum annuum* (the plant world's richest source of vitamin C). Different varieties within this family account for the unique flavors and degrees of spicy heat found in different paprikas. The coun-

try of origin (there are also paprikas from France, Portugal, and several Eastern European countries), the region, and the drying process also add to the nuances of flavor.

Hungarian paprika comes from the areas around the

southern cities of Szeged and Kalocsa, where fresh peppers were traditionally strung into long scarlet garlands and then hung to air-dry from the house eaves. These days, they're more commonly dried in commercial ovens before

being stone ground. And while Hungary produces six special varieties of paprika, they export just two to us—sweet and hot (in this case, sweet simply means not hot).

For Hungarians, paprika is an indispensable element



More than a pretty color. Try the intense red-pepper flavor of good paprika in spice rubs, pilafs, stews, and vinaigrettes.

Experiment with paprika

Hungarian paprika

- ◆ Sauté cabbage with onion, caraway seed, and paprika; stir in sour cream at the end.
- ◆ Make a thick potato soup with caramelized onions and paprika; garnish with crisp bacon.
- ◆ Stew chunks of veal or sausage with lots of tomatoes, sweet bell peppers, onion, garlic, freshly ground pepper, and paprika.
- ◆ Braise thick pork chops in a little broth with garlic, onion, and paprika; stir in a bit of cream or sour cream at the end and sprinkle with fresh dill.
- ◆ Sear strips of beef fillet and toss with sautéed mushrooms, onions, garlic, and paprika; add sour cream at the end.
- ◆ Dip fillets of white-fleshed fish in paprika-seasoned flour and sauté in lard (or use pimentón and sauté in olive oil).
- ◆ Brown chicken thighs with whole shallots and garlic cloves, season with paprika and fresh thyme, and simmer in a little white wine.

Spanish pimentón

- ◆ Flavor an omelet or scrambled eggs with pimentón; fill with or fold in goat cheese and sautéed mushrooms.
- ◆ Sauté thinly sliced potatoes and onions in olive oil until browned and tender; stir in pimentón at the end. Or, dress a baked potato with spoonfuls of extra-virgin olive oil seasoned with pimentón.
- ◆ Flavor a rice pilaf with grated lemon zest and pimentón.
- ◆ Season a lamb and chickpea or white bean stew with pimentón.
- ◆ Coat a pork or lamb roast with a crumb crust flavored with olive oil, thyme, parsley, and pimentón.
- ◆ Top grilled fish fillets or sea scallops with a dollop of pimentón–rosemary butter.
- ◆ Toss roasted red peppers and chunks of roasted tomato with a garlic-pimentón vinaigrette; serve as an appetizer or side dish.

of cooking. As a part of their culinary “holy trinity”—onions cooked in freshly rendered pork fat with paprika—it contributes its unmistakable, intensely concentrated vegetal flavor to dishes such as soups, stews, and cabbage dishes. It’s impossible to imagine such classics as chicken *paprikás* (chicken simmered with onions, green bell pepper, tomato, paprika, and sour cream), stuffed cabbage (leaves stuffed with ground pork and beef, rice, paprika, onions, and garlic), or mutton *gulyás* (lamb stewed with green peppers, onions, tomatoes, potatoes, and hot paprika) without their earthy, piquant paprika seasoning.

Paprika has an unmistakable, intensely concentrated vegetal flavor.

It would be just as unthinkable for a Spaniard to find the big, toasted taste of pimentón missing from chorizo sausage, from *ajada* (olive oil sauce fragrant with sautéed garlic), or from *fideuá* (a Valencian fish, shrimp, and pasta dish).

Spanish pimentón has an affinity to all sorts of foods, from potatoes, rice, beans, and eggs to seafood, pork,

lamb, and game. Hungarian paprika is good in luscious cream and sour cream sauces, stews, potatoes, vegetables, and soups. Either is terrific as part of a seasoning rub for roasts and grilled foods. I also like to add a teaspoon to a quick meat or vegetable sauté at the last minute so the paprika cooks long enough to infuse its flavor into the dish but doesn’t burn.

Both Spanish and Hungarian paprikas come packed in small tins with tightly reclosable lids to keep air out and flavor in. They’re best stored away from heat and light and used within six to nine months. Most supermarkets carry the familiar red tins of Hungarian Szeged paprika in both sweet and hot types, but for now, Spanish pimentón (available in three heat levels: *dulce*, *agridulce*, and *picante*, from the sweetest to the hottest) is available only by mail-order and online (see Sources, p. 76).

A frequent Fine Cooking contributor, Leslie Revsin is a chef and cookbook author. She lives in New York. ♦

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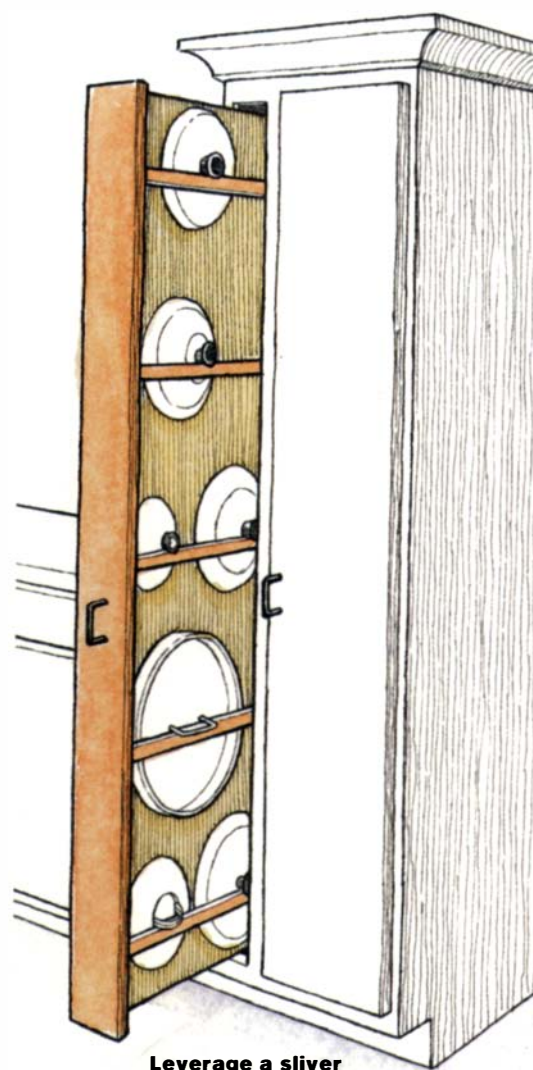
KITCHEN DETAIL

Does your kitchen have a feature that really works? Send a description and a photo to Kitchen Detail, *Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506, or e-mail fc@taunton.com. We pay for submissions we publish.

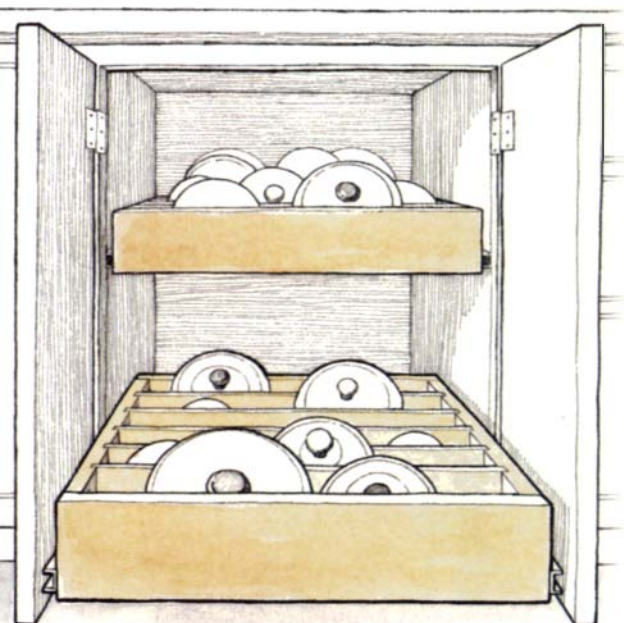
Storing pot lids, noiselessly

The great challenge with pot and pan lids is where to stash them. In many homes, they're shoved willy nilly into a cabinet, where they can become very annoying very quickly. Few kitchen noises are as loud and obnoxious as the clang and clatter of lids banging around as you search for the one you want.

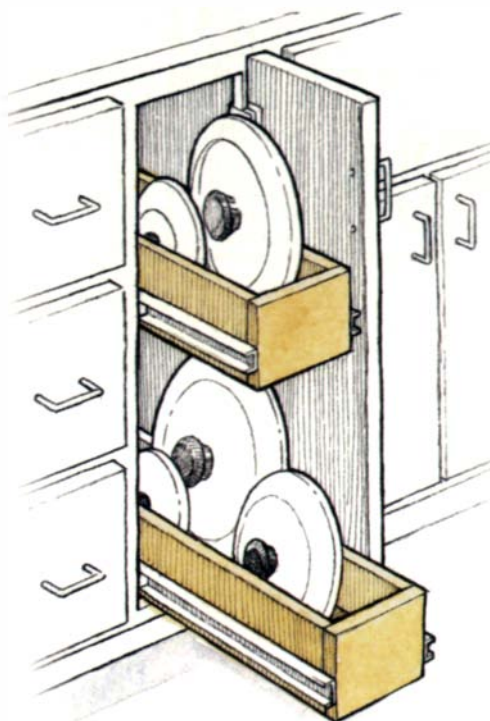
One elementary solution is to devote a shallow drawer to lids, stacking them in piles of two or three. They won't slide around very much, and with little effort, you'll be able to see what you've got. But if your kitchen is endowed with deep drawer space, you'll probably be happier with one of the inventive ideas shown on these pages. Or try one of the store-bought options at far right (see Sources, p. 76). Whichever way you decide to organize your lids, put them in the most logical place: near the stove.



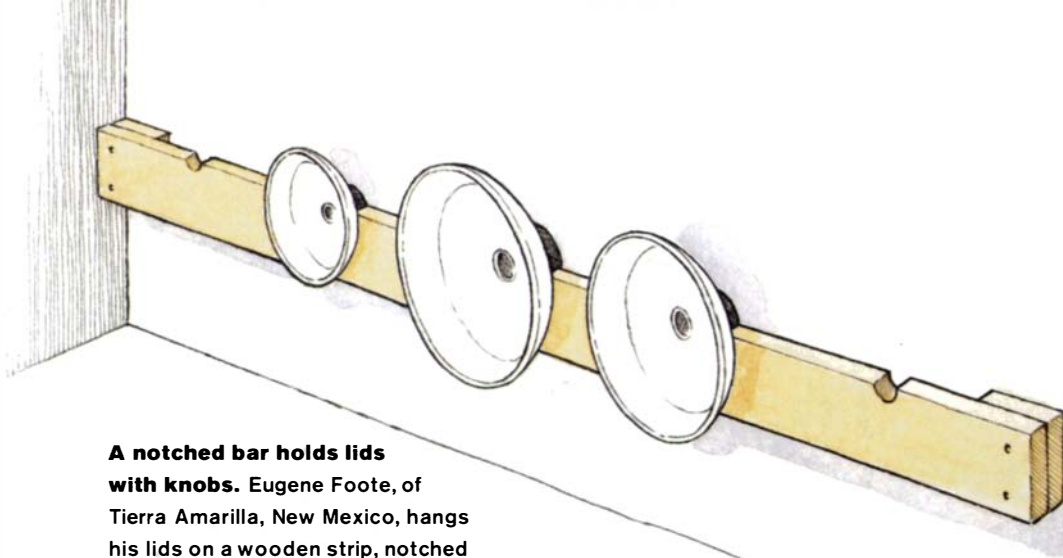
Leverage a sliver of space to maximum effect. Making use of what would have otherwise been wasted space, Helen Lupien, of Danielson, Connecticut, stores her lids vertically on the side of a narrow slide-out door.



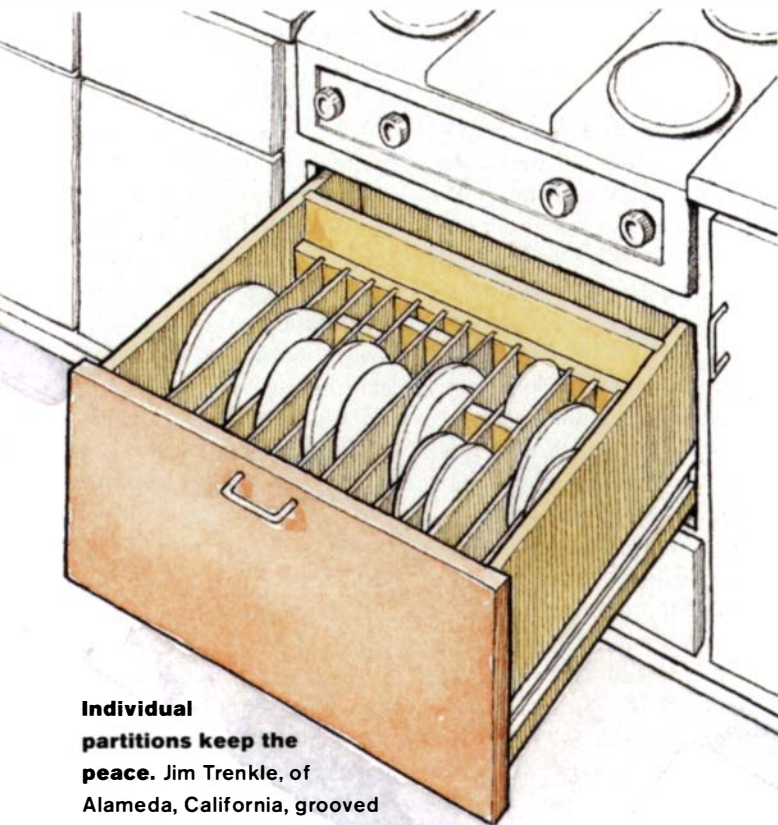
File lids to show all your wares at a glance. Low dividers that run left to right keep lids organized in the kitchen of David Michael Cane of Solvang, California. He sorts the largest lids in back and the smallest in front.



Double-decker drawers keep lids handy. Joan Hannas of Newton, New Jersey, keeps pot and pan lids sorted in two shallow, slender drawers in a base cabinet alongside her stove.

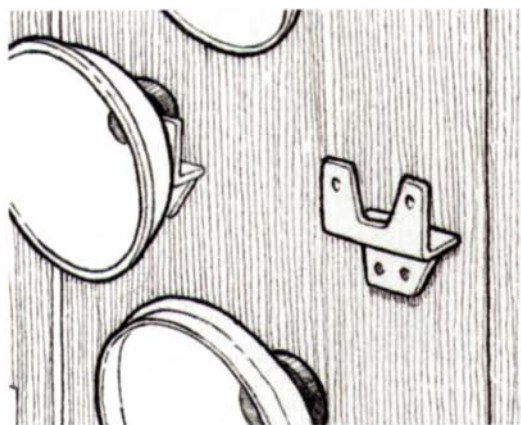


A notched bar holds lids with knobs. Eugene Foote, of Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, hangs his lids on a wooden strip, notched at intervals to match the sizes of the lids.

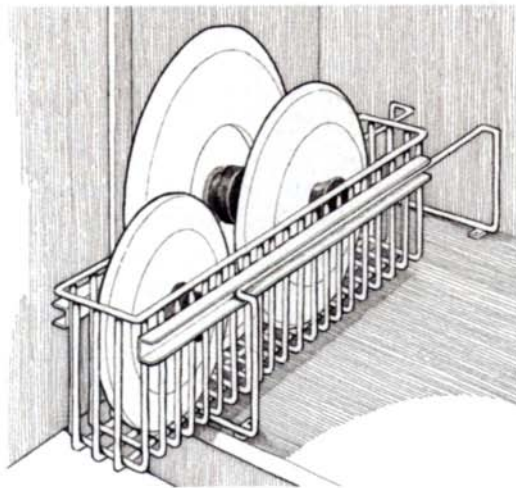


Individual partitions keep the peace. Jim Trenkle, of Alameda, California, grooved slots in the front and back walls of a deep drawer, spacing them at measured widths for his lids, and then slid partitions into each slot. Regardless of size, all the lids sit about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch below the drawer rim for easy access; wooden blocks in each slot raise the lid as needed. Foam weatherstripping in the slots mutes rattling.

Two store-bought options for pot lid storage

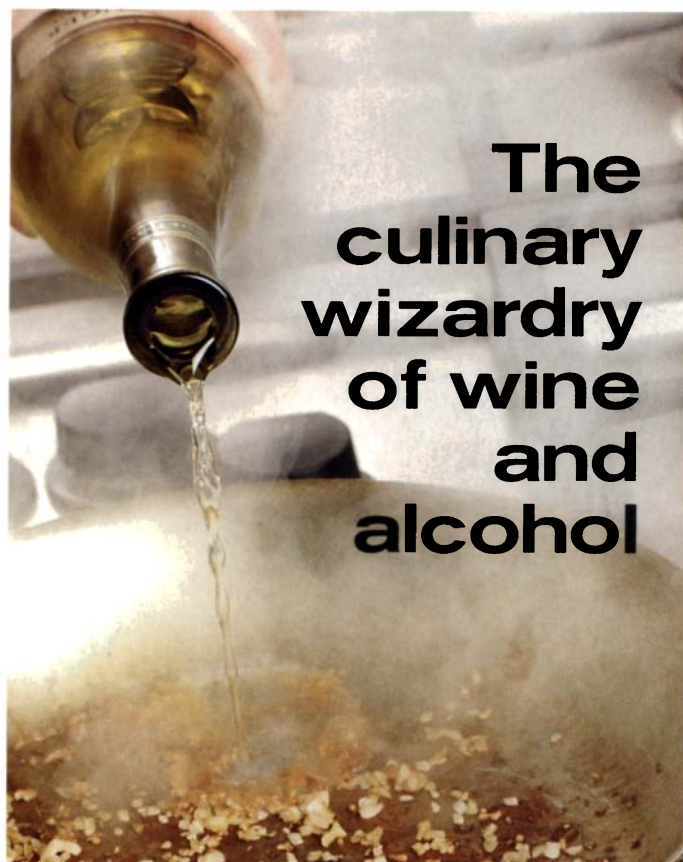


Reversible lid holders. These clear plastic supports are designed for both knob or handle-style lids and can be mounted inside cabinet doors or on any flat surface.



Sliding rack. This chrome basket, with a single lengthwise divider, can be installed on the floor of a base cabinet.

BY SHIRLEY O. CORRIHER



The culinary wizardry of wine and alcohol

Most cooks will tell you that adding wine to fruit salads, sauces, marinades, risottos, braises, ragùs, broths, the stuck-on browned bits in a sauté pan, and many other foods enhances flavor. If you ask why, they may tell you that the wine's fruity character or its crisp acidity adds depth and sparkle to a dish. But there's more to wine than just fruit and acidity. As a cooking agent, wine and other alcoholic beverages work a lot harder than you may think, thanks to alcohol's amazing ability to extract flavors that would otherwise remain trapped in food.

From grape juice to wine

In addition to wine's role in extracting flavors, it has its own wonderful nuanced flavors from fermentation.

During the fermentation of grape juice, large, bland molecules break down into smaller, more flavorful compounds, producing dramatic changes in flavor. Enzymes break big carbohydrates into sugars. Then yeast and other microorganisms ingest these sugars, plus sugars already present in the grape juice, and give off carbon dioxide, alcohol, and all sorts of flavorful byproducts, from organic acids like acetic acid and lactic acid to amino acids. The acidity causes more molecular breakdowns, until eventually the amount of alcohol in the wine reduces the activity of the microorganisms. (The same process is at work in rising bread dough; see *Fine Cooking* #43, p. 80.) At some point, the winemaker decides that the wine has the desired flavors, and it's bottled. Whether you're

drinking it or cooking with it, wine offers a complex mixture of flavorful compounds.

Alcohol coaxes out flavor

Some flavor components in foods dissolve in water, and some dissolve in fat. One of the reasons that fat-free foods often taste so boring is that the fat-soluble flavors in the dish remain locked in the food. Even a tiny bit of fat can dissolve and carry flavors, making a dish much more flavorful than if it were totally fat-free.

Alcohol, be it in wine, beer, or hard liquor like vodka, is a powerful flavor extractor, too. It dissolves not only water-soluble flavors and fat-soluble flavors but also flavor components that neither water nor fat can dissolve. For example, we use alcohol to extract flavor from vanilla beans, and the reward is vanilla extract.

This ability of alcohol to extract and carry flavors makes it a great asset for cooks. When you splash a few tablespoons of wine into a skillet that was used to sauté meat or vegetables, you usually scrape up the stuck-on bits of food so they'll dissolve in the wine. By doing this, you're not only getting the flavors of the wine and of the caramelized browned bits in your dish, you're also getting some extra flavors that only alcohol can extract.

This may be why vodka, which is relatively weak on flavor but high in alcohol, makes an occasional appearance in sauces. Why would a tomato sauce spiked with vodka have so much more flavor even though the sauce simmers long enough to boil off most of the alcohol? There must be a key flavor component in tomatoes that dissolves in alcohol.

Once the alcohol dissolves that flavor component and releases it into the sauce, its job is done, so it doesn't matter that most of it boils off.

Does it all evaporate?

Alcohol boils at a lower temperature than water, so you'd think that the alcohol would completely evaporate before the water, but this doesn't happen. Some of the alcohol and water combine to form an inseparable mixture called an azeotrope. So even after lengthy boiling, some alcohol remains bound with water.

Not surprisingly, the cooking method and cooking time also influence how much alcohol evaporates. Flambéing removes about 25% of the original alcohol. Simmering on the stovetop for 30 minutes evaporates about 65% of the alcohol. And 2½ hours of simmering removes about 95%. (For more on this topic, see *Fine Cooking* #44, p. 18.)

Cooking without wine

I'm often asked what to substitute for wine in recipes. To replace the flavor of the wine itself, you can use a little fruit juice (or verjus; see a recipe on p. 51), but without the alcohol to do its flavor-extraction magic, you won't get as much complexity. To draw out as much flavor as possible without the alcohol, include a little water and fat to dissolve and carry water- and fat-soluble flavors. And you may want to boost flavor with citrus zest, vinegar, fresh herbs, or Parmesan—something to compensate for the wine's absence.

Food scientist Shirley O. Corriher is a contributing editor to *Fine Cooking*. ♦

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A new slant on measuring liquids

If you're in the market for a liquid measuring cup, consider Oxo's new plastic cup, whose angled interior marks give an accurate measure by allowing you to look down into the cup as an alternative to having to crouch down to get an eye-level reading. A small thing, but one you could get used to. The padded rubber handle is very comfortable, too. The cup, available in 1- and 2-cup capacities, sells for \$5 to \$7 at kitchen stores and at Kitchen Etc. (800/232-4070; www.kitchenetc.com).

—Sarah Jay, managing editor

Roasting goes high-tech

Williams-Sonoma's new remote thermometer lets you monitor the progress of foods in the oven or on the grill from up to 100 feet away—a very handy feature if, like most people, you have other things to do while dinner's cooking.

Here's how it works: A long temperature probe stays in the roast throughout cooking. It's tethered by a slim cable to a small digital countertop transmitter, which sends information to a remote pocket-size receiver that goes with you. You set the desired degree of doneness, and the receiver beeps

when the food reaches this point. The receiver also has a readout of the food's current temperature, which is nice if you're trying to coordinate the timing of side dishes. And it has a timer/stopwatch feature that can run simultaneously with the thermometer. To order, call 800/541-2233

or go online to www.williams-sonoma.com; the cost is \$54 plus shipping.

—Jennifer Armentrout,
test kitchen manager



Sweet and smoky tomatoes

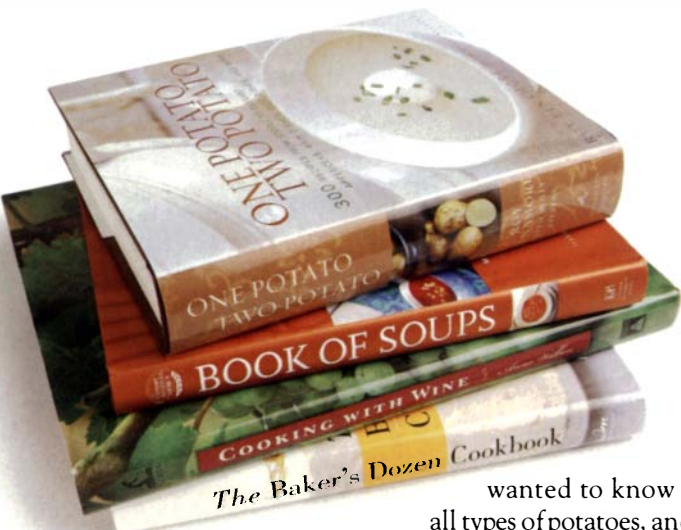
The flavor and look of a backyard barbecue burst out of the can of Muir Glen's new Fire Roasted Tomatoes. As with Muir Glen's other tomato products, the fire-roasted variety is meaty and surprisingly sweet—the company diligently checks the tomatoes' brix (a measure of their sugars) before harvesting. The payoffs are these tomatoes' slightly smoky essence and the additional flavor in their charred, caramelized skin. I like to slowly steep the tomatoes with some good olive oil, garlic, and a couple of bay leaves and then toss them with angel hair pasta or spread them,



along with some black olives, across a mild white fish like halibut.

Muir Glen's Fire Roasted Tomatoes come crushed or diced and in 14½- and 28-ounce cans (about \$1.89 and \$2.29, respectively). For more information, call 800/832-6345 or log onto www.muirglen.com.

—Tony Rosenfeld,
assistant editor



New books from the *Fine Cooking* family

This past year, many of our contributors have been busy producing some exciting cookbooks.

In *One Potato, Two Potato* (\$35; 590 pp.), *Fine Cooking's* contributing editor Molly Stevens and Roy Finamore pay homage to the world's favorite tuber. Highlighting the spud's prominence in regional cuisines, the authors explain everything you ever

wanted to know about all types of potatoes, and, better yet, how to apply this knowledge in the kitchen. Some standout dishes include Old-Fashioned Potato Soup and Ajiaco (a Colombian potato and chicken stew).

The colorful photos and user-friendly recipes practically steam off the pages of *The Culinary Institute of America's Book of Soups* (\$35; 212 pp.), edited by *Fine Cooking's* test kitchen manager Jennifer Armentrout

(in her former life at the CIA). The home cook will appreciate that each of the book's first seven chapters outlines (in simple terms, not cookspeak) a specific technique to make a soup, like broths, and then expands on the method with seasonal and ethnic recipes, Thai Hot & Sour Soup and French Onion Soup among them.

As interchangeable as the relationship between wine and food is, few books adequately address the pairing's dynamic in cooking. Teaching master and frequent *Fine Cooking* author Anne Willan takes on the task in *Cooking with Wine*

(\$49.50; 288 pp.). For every recipe, many of them traditional Italian or French dishes, Willan discusses the perfect wine for cooking the dish and for accompanying the meal.

Reading *The Baker's Dozen Cookbook* (\$40; 357 pp.) is like joining a self-help baking class. Thirteen of the country's leading bakers, many of them *Fine Cooking* regulars, come together to solve some of the nagging mysteries of the baking world. In the process, they provide plenty of solid recipes, like Carolyn Weil's Creamy Mocha Pie and Flo Braker's Angel Food Cake.—T. R. ♦

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ENJOYING WINE

BY TIM GAISER



A theme is a good way to focus a tasting. For example, try Sauvignon Blancs from all over the world.



"Tasting requires concentration, but it should be fun, too,"
says Tim Gaiser.

Putting together your own wine tasting is one of the best ways to sharpen your tasting skills, learn about the vocabulary of wine, and discover your own tastes. But while tasting should always be fun, learning about the wine and retaining what you've learned require a bit of focus. So, before any bottles are opened and any wine is poured, you'll need to do a little preparation. Here's how to put together an organized tasting that's both focused and a great way to spend time with friends.

Decide on a theme

First you'll need to decide which wines to taste. The

Host a bona fide wine tasting

Doing it right—with tasting mats, a lineup of glasses, and a theme—provides focus and a lot of fun

best way to do this is to stick to a theme. Here are a few suggestions.

◆ **A single grape variety.** Try making a well-known grape like Chardonnay, Cabernet Sauvignon, or Merlot the focus of your tasting. Wines

from these grapes are produced in wine regions all around the world, so this is a great way to explore how place of origin can express itself in terms of character. Or, try exploring lesser-known varieties such as Cab-

ernet Franc or Viognier to learn more about their personalities.

◆ **A single geographic region.** Tasting wines from the Marlborough in New Zealand, for example, is one of the best ways to learn what a wine-growing area has to offer (short of visiting, that is).

◆ **A single producer.** This is a really good way to get to know a winemaker's style, as well as to find out how well they've handled challenges—such as frost, early hot weather, too much or too little rainfall—that can make for difficult vintages.

◆ **Wines under \$10.** Organizing your tasting needn't cost a fortune, and having a

set budget can actually expand your options as far as the potential selection and number of wines used.

Decide whether or not to “blind taste”

Blind tasting involves brown-bagging the bottles so no one knows the identity of the wines until the bottles are revealed. Blind tasting can be a valuable experience for tasters at any level of expertise. For novice tasters, it requires suspending preconceived notions of likes and dislikes, providing a chance to expand your tastes. For advanced tasters, blind tasting helps avoid prejudices and expectations and helps improve your ability to guess a wine's identity. But blind tasting isn't the only way to go. There's just as much merit—and a total lack of pressure—in knowing what you're tasting.

Horizontal vs. vertical tastings

You may have heard the terms horizontal and vertical associated with wine tastings. Both are effective ways to explore wines.

Horizontal tastings consist of wines from the same grape variety and vintage from producers within a certain region (1999 Pinot Noirs from Oregon's Willamette Valley). Or the focus can be as broad as from around the world (1999 Pinot Noir from Oregon, Burgundy, and California). Horizontal tastings are especially helpful for beginners who want to learn about a certain grape variety or region in the context of a single harvest.

Vertical tastings consist of several different vintages

Tasting wine engages all your senses

Sight

—one of the most overlooked parts of wine tasting. Hold your glass at a



45-degree angle on a white background. Look for:

♦ **Clarity.** The wine should be free of particles or sediment.

♦ **Brightness.** Most wines are filtered and thus brilliant. But more and more winemakers are choosing not to filter their wines. An unfiltered wine appears a bit hazy.

♦ **Color.** The intensity of the color of a wine is usually a good indicator of concentration and even of quality. A deeply colored red wine will almost always be more concentrated—and more tannic—than a lighter red.

♦ **Age.** White wines gain color as they age; reds lose color as they age. Both take on orange or brown hues as they age.

♦ **Legs.** Viscous, clingy “legs” or “tears” indicate how light- or full-bodied the wine is; you can see these by tilting the glass back and forth. Thicker, clingier legs indicate a higher level of alcohol or residual sugar in the wine.

Smell

—the most important aspect of tasting wine. Put your nose part way into the glass and take one long,



gentle sniff or several short sniffs. Look for:

♦ **Fault factor.** Is the wine well made and free of faults? If it smells off (vinegar? sulfur? moldy cardboard?), it will taste off.

♦ **Fruit.** Different varieties tend to smell like different fruits: Sauvignon Blancs like grapefruit, Chardonnays like green apples and pears, and Cabernet Sauvignon like black cherry.

♦ **Earthiness.** Wines from France, Italy, and Germany tend to have a more pronounced earthy quality, while wines from California, South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand tend to be more fruit-forward.

♦ **Oak aging.** Aromas like smoke, toast, baking spices, and toffee are all derived from aging the wine in oak barrels.

♦ **Age.** Young wines smell vibrant and full of fresh fruit. Older wines develop “bottle bouquet,” or secondary flavors of leather, spice box, tobacco, and earth.

Taste

—should confirm what you've already seen and smelled in the wine. Take a sip, drawing in just enough air to make a slight slurping noise. This sloshes the wine all over the inside of the mouth, intensifying the flavors. Look for:

♦ **Fruit, earth, and wood.**

These should confirm what you've just smelled in the wine. Everything there? Any surprises?

♦ **Dryness vs. sweetness.**

♦ **Body or mouth-feel.**

How light or heavy is the wine in your mouth?

♦ **Acidity.** Acids in wine give a tart, puckering sensation. A good level of acidity is needed to balance any wine, to give it the ability to age, and to make it pair well with food.

♦ **Tannins.** Tannins create the same taste sensation as the bitterness of overly brewed tea and come from grape skins or from the wooden barrels in which wine is often aged. Tannin is also needed to balance most wines.

♦ **Age:** Younger wines are more aggressive and direct in flavor, while older wines tend to be more layered, subtle, and complex.

♦ **Finish.** How long do the wine's flavors linger after you swallow? The general rule is the longer the finish, the better the wine—regardless of what the wine is or how much it costs.

of the same wine from the same producer (for example, 1990, '91, '92, '93, and '94 vintages of Château Margaux). A vertical tasting is especially good for advanced tasters, and it's probably the best way to learn about a particular winemaker and how his or her style has evolved over a given period of time. There's also no better way to get a "snapshot" of each vintage in reference to a specific region or vineyard. The only drawback to a vertical tasting is the potentially high cost of buying older vintages.

Set a limit of six to eight wines

Once you've chosen the theme for your tasting, it's time to select the wines. When choosing wines for a tasting, set wine critics' rat-

Set up with a few simple items

◆ **Wineglasses** needn't be expensive crystal (but they shouldn't be plastic disposables or jelly jars, either). Basic wineglasses will almost always do, unless you're hosting a vertical tasting of rare wines. (See *Fine Cooking* #35, p. 22, for more on glassware.) Generally, the higher the quality of wines tasted, the better the glassware needed. If you're hosting a crowd, rent durable glasses from a party rental company—just be sure they don't have any detergent residue. Or, ask your guests to bring their own glassware (so you won't be left with a kitchen full of dirty glasses).
◆ **Spit buckets**, also called dump buckets, can be as simple

as large paper or plastic cups for each taster or large cardboard takeout buckets, spaced at intervals on the table. Tasting and spitting isn't just for professionals—it's good practice for anyone reviewing more than a few wines in one sitting. Spitting also greatly reduces the odds of your tasting devolving into a bacchanal.

◆ **Crackers or bread** (I like sliced baguettes) are essential to refresh your palate between wines. Any serious eating, however, should be saved until after the serious tasting has been completed.

◆ **Tasting mats** help everyone keep track of the wines they're tasting. You can make them easily from 8½x11-inch paper

with the names of the wines clearly printed on them, leaving enough space for each glass.

◆ **Note pads and pens** are handy for taking notes you can refer to later on.

◆ **Water glasses** and water pitchers to help each guest refresh his or her palate between wines.



Cardboard beer or soft drink cartons double as handy wineglass carriers.

We have to be extra nice to Mommy today.



© 2002 Nestlé

That's right, 'cause it's her birthday.

Did you and Mommy used to make cookies?

Oh yes. She liked lots of chocolate, just like you.

How many candles is she?

Maybe you should ask your Mommy.



Brown-bagging wines allows you to taste "blind," to set aside preconceptions, and to hone your tasting skills.

ings and numerical scores aside. Instead, focus on the wines that will interest you and your tasting group the most.

Settle on a budget and have everyone in the group pitch in. (And if members of the tasting group actually have wine cellars, don't hesitate to have them bring a

bottle if it jibes with the theme of the tasting.) Limit the number of wines to about six or eight—unless you're a very seasoned or professional taster, palate fatigue, as it's known in the trade, can quickly set in if more than six wines are tasted. And as with everything else, moderation is key.

Keep it relaxed but focused

As both a tasting leader and participant, I find that things go most smoothly if the host or someone else leads everyone through the tasting, keeping in mind that the tasting oughtn't take the format of a serious lecture. If more expertise is desired, bring in someone from the wine industry to lead the tasting. Wineries, wine distributors,



White paper tasting mats provide the best background for examining a wine's color.

and wine shops are all good sources for finding a skilled tasting leader.

Pour small portions and take time to think and discuss

A two- to three-ounce pour is the rule for formal tasting, and a 750-milliliter bottle of wine will easily serve six

tasters with some left over for later.

Allow your guests at least five minutes to evaluate each wine. This should be enough time to taste the wine several times and make complete notes. Afterwards, initiate a discussion about each wine, including personal likes, dislikes, and overall impressions. Scoring the wines in order of preference can be fun, especially if the wines are being tasted blind: Each taster ranks the wines in order of preference, with a score of "1" as the highest mark. After totaling the scores, the wines are unbagged—and invariably, there are surprises.

Tim Gaiser, a contributing editor to Fine Cooking, is a master sommelier and a wine consultant. ♦



The very best times begin with America's favorite rich and creamy morsel.

Bake The Very Best.™

READER SERVICE NO. 96

The very best recipe made very easy.

Original Nestlé® Toll House® Chocolate Chip Cookies

- 2 1/4 cups all-purpose flour
- 1 tsp. baking soda
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 cup (2 sticks) butter, softened
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 3/4 cup packed brown sugar
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- 2 large eggs
- 2 cups (12-oz. pkg.) Nestlé® Toll House® Semi-Sweet Chocolate Morsels
- 1 cup chopped nuts

Preheat oven to 375°F. Combine flour, baking soda, and salt in small bowl. Beat butter, granulated sugar, brown sugar, and vanilla extract in large mixer bowl until creamy. Add eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat in flour mixture. Stir in morsels and nuts. Drop by rounded tablespoon onto ungreased baking sheets. Bake for 9–11 minutes. Makes about 60 cookies.

For many more easy recipes log on to:
www.VeryBestBaking.com



TIPS

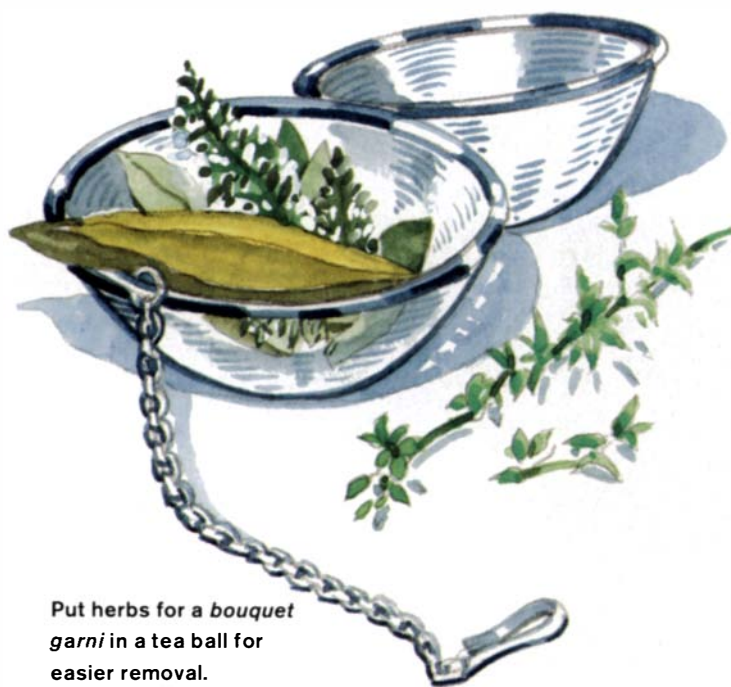
Do you have any cool tricks, improved techniques, or clever ideas that make your cooking more efficient, enjoyable, or delicious?

Write to *Tips, Fine Cooking*, PO Box 5506, Newtown, CT 06470-5506. Or send your tip by e-mail to fc@taunton.com. We pay for tips we publish.

Put fresh herbs in a tea ball for soups

I have a large tea ball that comes in handy when I make soups. I put my herbs and whole spices in the tea ball and hang it over the edge of the soup pot. This way I can remove the tea ball when the soup is done, and I won't have herb branches and stems floating around in the soup. The tea ball also makes it easy to remove the whole spices once the proper flavoring is achieved.

—Linda Jawitz,
New York, NY



Put herbs for a bouquet garni in a tea ball for easier removal.

Waxed paper makes cleanup a breeze

When I'm baking or cooking, I often lay a piece of waxed paper on the counter for easy cleanup. When measuring flour or sugar, any excess falls on the paper and can easily be collected by lifting the corners of the paper and pouring it back into its container. Waxed paper is useful when separating eggs while making

angel food cake—put the broken shells on the paper in a pile—when you're done, just wrap the shells up in the paper and discard; no need to wipe the counter. It's also great for grating cheese on the counter, or setting wooden spoons during cooking...you get the idea.

—Yvonne Wai,
Bella Coola, British Columbia

Opening food cans safely

I keep my manual can opener near my refrigerator door so I can grab a refrigerator magnet to fish out the sharp-edged can lid without having to worry about cutting my fingers.

—Ken Fruehstorfer,
Palatine Bridge, NY

A small fan dispels onion fumes

I love to use caramelized onions in the winter to flavor my roasts and stews, and I've found the best way to peel and chop large quantities of onions without tears is to set a tiny (3- to 4-inch) electric fan (I found mine in a one-dollar store) so it blows right across the cutting board while I'm handling the onions. The blowing air dispels the onions' sulfuric compounds before they can waft upward to irritate my eyes and nose.

—Paul Perotti,
Reno, NV

A coffee scoop for measuring

I received a very nice stainless-steel, long-handled coffee scoop. Since I already have a few coffee measures, I've stored this one with my measuring spoons. The scoop measures 2 tablespoons exactly, and it's handy for use in

recipes that call for 2 tablespoons of olive oil or other ingredients. (Check your scoop, though—not all measure 2 tablespoons exactly).

—Jack Farrell,
Lansing, MI

Bake pizza on parchment

Instead of using cornmeal on my peel to slide homemade pizza onto a baking stone, I put a piece of parchment (that's just a little bigger than the pizza on top of the peel), assemble my pizza on the parchment, and slide both the parchment and the pizza onto the baking stone in the oven. This keeps my baking stone clean and prevents the mess of burnt cornmeal on the floor of my oven. When the pizza is done, I just slide the peel under the parchment and move the pizza onto a wooden cutting board.

—Charles Rose,
Virginia Beach, VA

Mustard bottle makes a great garnishing tool

I like to reuse my clear plastic mustard squeeze bottles by washing them and filling them with sweet or savory sauces to garnish everything from desserts and appetizers to main courses.

—Buffet Campbell,
Agawam, MA

Making an airtight seal on a food sack

In my kayaking class, I learned how to fold a sack so well that it's nearly air- and watertight. Now I do this when I want to seal up a bag of cereal, bread-crumbs, crackers, or chips. First, remove the excess air by pressing the bag shut right above the bag's contents, then fold the top edge down twice,

turn the bag over, and make triangular folds on both sides of the bag, flush against the food. Fold the top edge over once more and secure with a binder clip or a clothespin.

—Zoë Hunter,
Brookfield, CT

Wash your faucet after handling raw meat

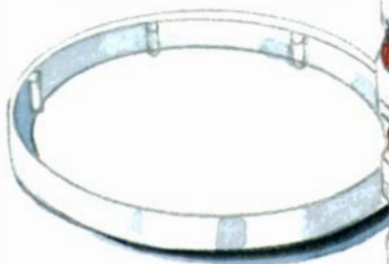
When I go to wash my hands after handling raw meat or poultry, I always run my soapy fingers over and under the faucet and its handles and give it a quick rinse as I rinse my hands. This eliminates any cross-contamination in case the faucet came into contact with the raw meat.

—Drew Dupuis,
St. Louis, MO

Freezing ground meat

I save plastic lids from deli containers to use when I want to portion and freeze ground meat such as pork, beef, or lamb. I make my meat patties in the shape of hamburgers and place each one on top of a lid, and then I stack the lids and patties and freeze them all together in zip-top bags. When I want to use the ground meat, I can easily separate just the number of patties I'll need.

—Linda Jawitz,
New York, NY



To freeze portions of ground meat, shape it into burgers, stack the burgers on plastic deli lids, and put in zip-top bags.

Rubber bands secure a casserole lid

When I need to bring my favorite casserole to a potluck, I use stout, thick rubber bands (the heavy-duty ones from broccoli are good) to keep the lid on the dish and make it easier to transport. I just hook a rubber band over one of the casserole handles and crisscross it over the lid knob, and then I do the same on the other side.

—R.B. Himes,
Vienna, OH



Before transporting a casserole, secure the lid with heavy-duty rubber bands.

Use wooden skewers to lift waffles

I enjoyed Pam Anderson's article "Finally, a Crisp Waffle" in *Fine Cooking* #47. To remove my waffles from the waffle iron without damaging them, I stick one wooden skewer into each side of the waffle and gently lift up. This prevents any tears or visible puncture marks on the waffles so I can serve them proudly to my guests.

—George Magladry,
Eureka, CA

A food pusher doubles as a dough tamper

I've just been given a recipe that requires pressing dough into a springform pan, and I was reminded of a trick that I use to make crushed cookie crusts in pie and tart pans. The plastic food pusher from an electric juicer or a food processor is ideal for tamping because it has a flat surface on the bottom and its rounded shape makes it easy to push dough into the corners and up the sides of a tart pan or a springform pan.

—Fran Enslein,
via e-mail

Warm the pan gently for stir-fries

I like to warm my stir-fry pan gently on low heat while I prepare my ingredients. This gives me time to prep the vegetables and slice the seafood or meat so that when I'm ready to start cooking, the pan is hot and ready to go. I just turn the heat up to high, add my oil, and start adding the ingredients.

—Gary Danko,
San Francisco, CA

Sautéing skin-on fish fillets

The skin on thin fish fillets, such as red snapper or trout, can shrink during cooking and cause the fillets to twist or curl as they're sautéing. To prevent this, I use a small, sharp knife to make a couple of very shallow, 1-inch-wide cuts in an X pattern on the fish skin before I sauté them so they stay nice and flat as they cook.

—Bettina Small,
Del Mar, CA ♦

Easy Pizza Dough

to Make and Freeze



If you have flour, a food processor, and 15 minutes, you can make pizza dough for tonight, tomorrow, or next week

BY EVAN KLEIMAN

A good pizza dough is a miraculous thing. It's easy to make, easy to freeze, takes all kinds of abuse and is still alive at the end of it all. We make 50 to 100 pounds of dough each day at Angeli, my small café in Los Angeles. And yet, after sixteen years, I still smile each time I see that large mound of dough on the pizza table waiting to be portioned. It feels good to know you've got dough rising, and it feels even better to sink your hands into the lively mass and work it as you transform the dough into pizza or bread.

But to be honest, in these sixteen years, I've never made pizza dough at home. Any time the urge to eat pizza has overcome us at home, we often haven't planned ahead. So the simple idea of eating a homemade pizza gets nixed because I don't feel like making dough right then.

But after working on this article, I think I've solved this problem—in two ways. First, I've got a dough that comes together in a food processor very quickly (from measuring to mixing to portioning, the whole thing takes less than 15 minutes). So if

Photos: this page, Mark Thomas; all others, Steve Hunter.

Easy Pizza Dough

You can make the dough a day or a couple of weeks ahead. Put the individual balls in zip-top bags and refrigerate overnight or freeze for longer. *Yields four balls of dough for four individual 8-inch pizzas; 1¾ pounds total.*

1 package (2¼ tsp.) active-dry yeast

1½ cups very warm water (110°F)

18 oz. (4 cups) all-purpose flour; more for dusting

1½ tsp. salt

2 Tbs. olive oil

Make the dough—Dissolve the yeast in the warm water and set aside (a Pyrex 2-cup measure makes for easy pouring; be sure the cup isn't cold). Meanwhile, put the flour and salt in a food processor fitted with the steel blade; process briefly to mix. With the machine running, add the water-yeast mixture in a steady stream. Turn the processor off and add the oil. Pulse a few times to mix in the oil.

Divide the dough

Scrape the soft dough out of the processor and onto a lightly floured surface. With lightly floured hands, quickly knead the dough into a mass, incorporating any bits of flour or dough from the processor bowl that weren't mixed in. Cut the dough into four equal pieces with a knife or a dough scraper. Roll each piece into a tight, smooth ball, kneading to push the air out.

Follow the directions in the sidebars at right for rising and storing the dough.



A quick mix: Pulse flour and salt and then, with the machine running, pour in a water and yeast mixture.



Four easy pieces: Cut the roughly shaped dough into quarters.

you want pizza tonight, all you need to do after mixing is to proof the dough for about 45 minutes—time to get your toppings prepped and your oven heated. The pizzas bake very quickly in a hot oven, so you could potentially have homemade pizza in little more than an hour.

Second—and I'm really pleased with this idea—you can make the dough ahead of time, at your convenience, say some day when you actually have a free 15 minutes. This is because the dough holds really well, either overnight in the refrigerator or for a few

Pizza tonight

If you want to bake the pizzas as soon as possible, put the dough balls on a lightly floured surface, cover them with a clean dishtowel, and let them rise until they almost double in size, about 45 minutes. Meanwhile, turn your oven on, with the baking stone in it, to let the stone fully heat. To shape, top, and bake the pizzas, see pp. 38-39.

Pizza tomorrow

If you want to bake the pizzas tomorrow, line a baking sheet with a floured dishtowel, put the dough balls on it, and cover them with plastic wrap, giving them room to expand (they'll almost double in size), and let them rise in the refrigerator overnight.

To use dough that has been refrigerated overnight, simply pull it out of the refrigerator about 15 minutes before shaping the dough into a pizza. To shape, top, and bake the pizzas, see pp. 38-39.

Pizza next week

To freeze the dough balls, dust each one generously with flour as soon as you've made it, and put each one in a separate zip-top bag. Freeze for up to a month.

It's best to transfer frozen dough from the freezer to the refrigerator the night before (or 10 to 12 hours before) you want to use it. But I've found that dough balls pulled straight from the freezer and left to warm up on the counter will be completely defrosted in about 1½ hours. The dough is practically indestructible. To shape, top, and bake the pizzas, see pp. 38-39.

Shaping your pizza

Put the ball of dough on a lightly floured wooden board. (Be sure the ball is proofed or thawed; see the directions on p. 37.) Sprinkle a little more flour on top of the ball. Using your fingertips, press the ball down into a flat cake about ½ inch thick.

Lift the dough and lay it over the back of

the fist of one hand. Put your other fist under the dough, right next to your first fist. Now gently stretch the dough by moving your fists away from each other. Each time you do this stretch, rotate the dough. Continue stretching and rotating until the dough is thin, about ¼ inch, and measures

about 9 inches across. Unless your dough is still cold from the freezer, it will be so soft that its own weight will stretch it out. Alternatively, use a rolling pin to roll out the dough thinly on a floured board. If you like a very thin pizza, roll the dough out to a 10-inch round. Be careful not to make it

too thin, and remember that the thinner the pizza, the less topping it can handle.

Rub a bit of flour onto a wooden pizza peel (or the back of a baking sheet). Gently lift the stretched dough onto the floured peel. Top the pizza, scattering the ingredients around to within ½ inch of the border.



In just 45 minutes, the dough is proofed. These dough balls are ready to be shaped.



The first step: Flatten the ball into a cake. Flour your fingers—and the board—for easier handling.



Next, stretch the dough by using the backs of your hands or a rolling pin. Follow the directions above to get the dough about ¼ inch thick.

weeks in the freezer. After mixing and portioning the dough, just dust the individual balls with a little flour, tuck each one into its own zip-top freezer bag, and toss it in the freezer. Now you're prepared for any pizza emergency that may arise. Yes, you still need to remember to defrost the dough (you can do this the night before, if you like), but you're still definitely ahead of the game.

The quick mix—make pizza dough in the food processor

The pizza dough I've developed for home comes together quickly in a food

processor. It's a fairly soft, somewhat wet dough, so you do have to scrape and pull a bit to get the dough out of the food processor bowl and onto a floured board, but this is easy. I use a good amount of olive oil in the dough to add flavor and to create a pizza with a soft crumb. I go easy on the amount of salt in the dough, however, because salt retards the action of yeast. By adding a smaller amount of salt, you add insurance that your yeast will reactivate quickly when you remove the frozen dough ball from the freezer and bring it back to room temperature. In addition, the dough tastes fresh and sweet without too much salt.

Want to see this in action?

Check out our video on shaping pizzas at *Fine Cooking's* web site: www.finecooking.com

Topping your pizza

For some people, pizza isn't pizza without the scarlet of tomatoes peeking through the cheese, but there are many delicious savory combinations that show off fresh seasonal produce. It's better to use winter vegetables like greens or even canned tomatoes when fresh tomatoes are out of season.

To get you started, here are two of my favorite ways to top a pizza—plus lots of suggestions for combinations to inspire your own designs.

To make the Angeli Caffè's favorite, Pizza al Caprino:

Over the shaped pizza, scatter 10 to 15 cloves roasted or slow-cooked garlic (see p. 62), 5 to 6 oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes (drained and sliced), 3 ounces crumbled goat cheese, a few capers, and a pinch of oregano. Drizzle with extra-virgin olive oil.

To make a simple flatbread:

Scatter sliced garlic (3 to 4 cloves), minced fresh rosemary (from 1 small sprig), and coarse salt over the dough. Make several ½-inch slashes to keep the dough from puffing up. Drizzle with lots of extra-virgin olive oil before baking, and garnish with Parmesan. Serve this delicious "Pizza Aglio e Olio" with a salad or cheese.

To design your own pizza:

Use any of these topping combinations to inspire your own creation. A generous drizzle of olive oil is a great addition to just about any pizza.

- ◆ Sautéed onions, fresh sage leaves, grated pecorino romano, grated Parmesan.
- ◆ Basil pesto, toasted pine nuts, slow-cooked garlic (see p. 62), grated Parmesan.
- ◆ Sautéed leeks, chopped artichoke hearts, a bit of crushed tomatoes, grated Parmesan.
- ◆ Italian Fontina, Gorgonzola, sun-dried tomatoes.
- ◆ Garlic, olives, capers, anchovies, and crushed tomatoes.
- ◆ Sliced tomatoes, mozzarella, fresh basil.
- ◆ Thinly sliced prosciutto, ricotta, fresh basil, grated Parmesan.
- ◆ Cooked Italian sausage, sautéed onions, Italian Fontina, mozzarella.
- ◆ Sautéed mushrooms, thinly sliced cooked potatoes, Gorgonzola, crumbled cooked bacon or pancetta.



Baking your pizza

Put a pizza stone or unglazed terra-cotta tiles on the lowest rack of the oven and heat the oven to 500°F. Ideally, let the stone heat in the oven for an hour.

Shape and top your pizza following the directions at left. Shake the peel (or baking sheet) gently back and forth to

make sure the pizza isn't stuck. If it seems stuck, lift the edges up with a spatula and toss a bit of flour under the dough. Quickly slide the pizza onto the hot baking stone. Bake until the edges are golden, about 8 min. Using a peel, a wide spatula, or tongs, remove the pizza from the oven.

For easy handling, use a wooden pizza peel (for sources, see p. 76). Don't forget to toss a little flour on the peel before laying the shaped dough on it.

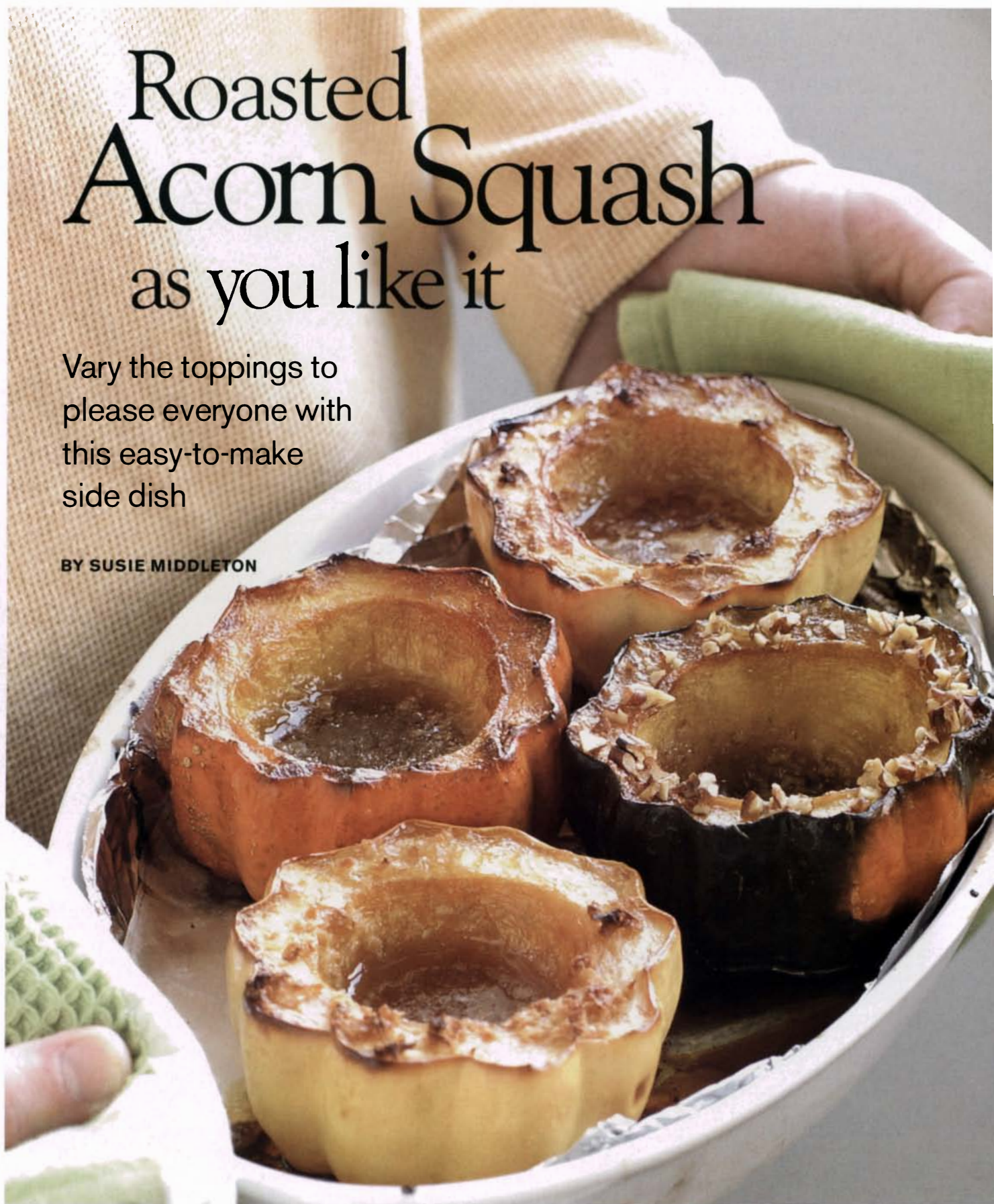
I use this dough to make my favorite kind of pizza—neapolitan style. It has a supple crust that's just thick enough to hold a good amount of topping without becoming a soggy mess. But sometimes I roll out this same dough to make a thinner, crisper pizza, which is more Roman style. It's delicious either way, with all kinds of toppings (see "Topping your pizza" at left).

Evan Kleiman is the chef-owner of Angeli Caffè in Los Angeles. She's the author of several cookbooks, including Cucina Fresca, Cucina Rustica, and Pasta Fresca. ◆

Roasted Acorn Squash as you like it

Vary the toppings to please everyone with this easy-to-make side dish

BY SUSIE MIDDLETON



Sometimes the simplest flavor combinations can be the most comforting. Take winter squash, maple syrup, and butter for example. Whoever first put these three ingredients into a hot oven on a cold winter night hundreds of years ago knew how to make someone happy. The sweet, earthy smell of squash slowly caramelizing in the oven is enough to get even finicky eaters to the table, spoon in hand.

Acorn squash is one of the best-shaped winter squashes for capturing those delicious flavors. Cut in half, seeds scooped out with a spoon, an acorn squash yields two pretty cup-shaped halves. With the ends trimmed slightly, the halves stand up straight and double as their own serving vessels. Each cup acts like a little pot for bubbling butter and sugar—and any other seasonings that happen to be along for the ride.

The “other seasonings” part is where the mood of the cook comes in. While a basic roasted squash with butter and maple syrup (or brown sugar) is hard to beat, there are a few variations and embellishments that make roasting an acorn squash or two as much fun for the cook as for the eaters. Try adding chopped pecans or chopped fresh ginger, or use orange juice or apple cider and honey in place of the maple syrup. Whatever combination you choose, just be sure to serve every squash with a spoon—half the fun is digging for gold.

RECIPE

Mater Recipe for Roasted Acorn Squash

I like orange- and white-skinned acorn squash for its slightly moister flesh and thinner skin, but the dark green kind is delicious too. Choose acorn squash on the smaller side; they'll be more tender and cook more quickly. *Each squash yields two substantial side-dish servings.*

1 acorn squash (about 1¼ lb.)
Seasonings from the recipes at right
¼ tsp. coarse salt

Heat the oven to 400°F. Slice a thin piece off both ends of the squash, including the stem. Cut the squash in half crosswise (perpendicular to the ribs). Scoop out the seeds with a sturdy spoon.

Line a rimmed baking sheet, jellyroll pan, or shallow baking dish with foil or parchment. (If you're only cooking two halves, be sure to use a small pan that the squash will fit into somewhat snugly.) If you use foil, rub it with butter to keep the squash from sticking.

Set the squash halves on the prepared baking sheet and smear the flesh all over with the softened butter (for the Parmesan Thyme Squash, just drizzle the olive oil all over). Sprinkle with the salt. Sprinkle or drizzle the remaining ingredients over the top edge of the squash and into the cavity (most of the liquid will pool up there).

Roast the squash halves until nicely browned and very tender (poke in several places with a fork to test), about 1 hour and 15 min. for small to medium squash; larger squash may take longer. Don't undercook. Serve warm with a spoon.

Flavorings for acorn squash

The measurements below are the total amount of seasonings needed for two acorn squash halves, so be sure to spread the ingredients evenly between the two.

MAPLE SQUASH:

1½ Tbs. unsalted butter, softened
2 Tbs. maple syrup
2 Tbs. chopped pecans (optional; add during last 10 min. of cooking) or 1½ tsp. minced fresh ginger (optional)

BROWN SUGAR SQUASH:

1½ Tbs. unsalted butter, softened
1½ Tbs. brown sugar

APPLE CIDER SQUASH:

1½ Tbs. unsalted butter, softened
2 Tbs. apple cider mixed with 1 Tbs. honey and a pinch of ground cinnamon

ORANGE CURRY SQUASH:

1½ Tbs. unsalted butter, softened
2 Tbs. orange juice mixed with 1 Tbs. honey, 1 tsp. minced fresh ginger, and a big pinch of curry powder

PARMESAN THYME SQUASH:

2 Tbs. olive oil
1 Tbs. freshly grated Parmesan
¼ tsp. chopped fresh thyme

Susie Middleton is Fine Cooking's executive editor. ♦

Use a sharp knife to trim acorn squash safely



Hold it steady. Grip the squash at one end and use swift, deliberate, forceful strokes to cut the tip off the opposite end.



Trim just enough to remove the stem (about ¾ inch); any more and you'll create a hole in the bottom of the “cup.”



Scoop and scrape. After cutting the trimmed squash in half, remove the seeds and any extra fibers with a sturdy spoon.

Cooking with Blue Cheese

Savor the distinctive flavors of blue cheese in five great recipes—for salads, tarts, and sauces

BY ALIZA GREEN

I met my first wheel of Stilton cheese during a trip to England when I was twelve years old. One taste of that strange-looking cheese shot through with veins of blue, and I was hooked—I couldn't seem to get enough of that bold, funky flavor.

Since then, I've tasted lots of other blue cheeses, and I've yet to try one that I really didn't like. I've found that they're all related by that unmistakable blue cheese tang, but each variety has its own nuances of flavor based on variables such as the type of milk it's made from and how it's aged. I've also learned that while blue cheeses are great for eating out of hand along with some crackers and fruit or nuts, they're even better when they're used as an ingredient in cooking because their intense flavors both accentuate and stand out against the flavors of other ingredients.

Blue cheeses are versatile partners

Blue cheeses complement a surprisingly broad range of foods. They're pungent and assertive, so they combine really well with starchy, rather bland foods like potatoes, pasta, and polenta. They also pair beautifully with beef; both are full-flavored, rich foods, and they harmonize perfectly. Grilled flank steak, rib steak, hamburgers, and roasts of beef all get an extra kick from a topping of blue cheese. And then there are salads, like the classic Cobb (smoked turkey, avocado, bacon, lettuce, tomato, and blue cheese) or a salad of watercress with blue cheese and poached figs. Blue cheeses are creamy

and salty, which is why they complement the bright flavors of so many vegetables and fruits.

Gentle heat only, please

Almost all blue cheeses are quite high in fat, so they act in cooking more like a ripened, creamy butter than a cheese. For this reason, if you're going to involve heat, it's best not to truly cook blue cheeses but rather to gently melt them. If the heat gets too high, the cheese will break and leave oily puddles in whatever you're cooking. So if you're making a cream sauce, pull the sauce from the fire and then stir in bits of the cheese until melted. If necessary, you can put the pot back on the heat just long enough for the cheese to finish melting.

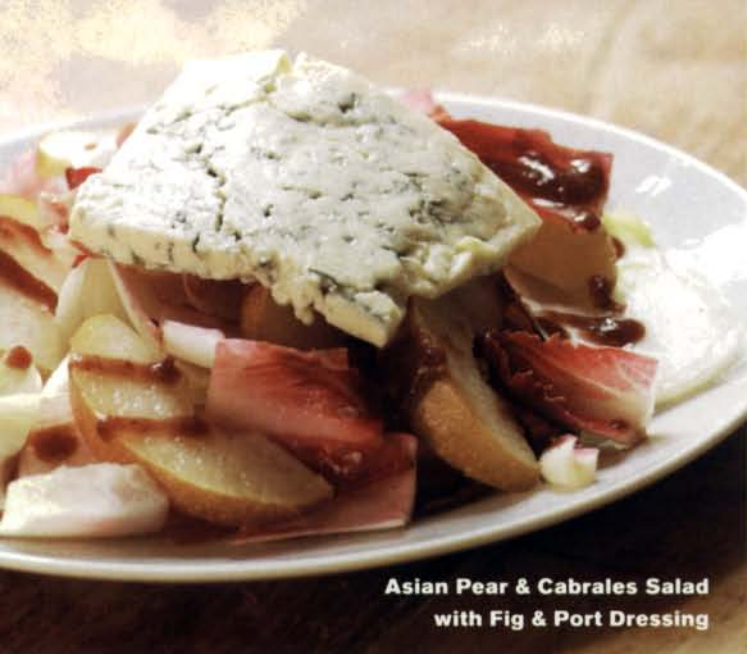
Your finished dish will only be as good as the cheese, especially if heat is involved. Blue cheese becomes especially strong tasting when heated, so any negative qualities in the cheese (bitterness, overpowering moldiness, and sharpness) will be accentuated. That's why I don't recommend cooking with commercially produced, inexpensive blues, which are often sold crumbled.

One last tip: I like to maintain the veined look of the blue cheese in my cooking. Even when I make a blue cheese dressing or dip, I purée only part of the cheese and fold in crumbled bits at the end. When making a sauce, I stir in the bits of cheese just before serving. This way I still have attractive bits of blue showing, rather than a uniformly grayish sauce.

(Continued)



Photos: Scott Phillips



**Asian Pear & Cabrales Salad
with Fig & Port Dressing**



**Broiled Spiced Flank Steak
with Walnut-Roquefort Butter**



**Quick Gorgonzola
Pasta Sauce**



**Bourbon-Marinated Buffalo
Chicken Strips with
Maytag Blue Dip**



**Stilton, Apple & Leek Tart
with a Spiced Whole-
Wheat Crust**

My five favorite blues

After lots of experimentation, I've narrowed my personal favorites for cooking and eating down to a short list of five: Italian Gorgonzola, French Roquefort, English Stilton, Spanish Cabrales, and American Maytag Blue. If you have the option, buy your cheeses from a reputable cheese-monger, and use the guidelines below to help you identify the high-quality cheeses from the commercially produced, overripe, and improperly stored versions.

Roquefort

(France) Made from sheep's milk, Roquefort will have an airy, crumbly texture, but it will still hold together. The cheese should be ivory colored without any yellow tint. The veins of greenish-blue mold will be abundant and will reach right to the edge of the cheese. Avoid Roquefort with excess moisture leaking from it (this happens when the cheese is re-wrapped in plastic over the foil). Because Roquefort has no rind, you can use the entire piece of cheese, although it will be saltier near the edge. If you like, you can rinse the cheese lightly under cold water to remove excess salt.

Gorgonzola

(Italy) There are two varieties of Gorgonzola: Mountain (aged) and Dolce (sweet). Both are made from cow's milk. Mountain Gorgonzola has a crumbly, dry texture and a potent blue flavor that's best if left unheated and served with fruits like pears and apples or with nuts and sweet wine to offset its intensity. Dolce Gorgonzola is sweet and mild with a rich, creamy interior that makes it an excellent choice for cooking. It has an ivory-colored interior that can be lightly or thickly streaked with bluish-green veins in layers. When aged more than six months, the flavor and aroma of Gorgonzola can be quite strong—sometimes downright stinky because of its brine-washed rind. Because of this tendency, pay particular attention to the quality of any Gorgonzola you buy (an interior that's more yellow than ivory is another sign of excessive aging).



Roquefort



Dolce Gorgonzola



Stilton



Cabrales



Maytag Blue

Stilton

(England) Made from cow's milk, Stilton has extremely fine veins of mold in a characteristic radial pattern that can look like shattered porcelain. This trait gives Stilton its overall blueing—not just in pockets like other blue cheeses—and allows for even flavor. Good Stilton has a dry, rough, brown rind and a creamy, ivory interior with plenty of blueing right to the edge. The cheese should be crumbly but moist enough to hold its shape. Avoid Stilton that has poor blue veining or a darkened or dry interior. The best Stilton for cooking comes from the inner core of the cheese, where it's creamiest. Buy Stilton in larger pieces so you'll end up with a good-sized section of interior. The rind and the hard portion near the rind aren't good for cooking, though some people like to eat them.

Cabrales

(Spain) Made from a blend of goat's, sheep's, and cow's milk, Cabrales (pronounced kah-BRAH-lays) is piquant, acidic, and creamy. A good Cabrales is completely shot through with a deep veining of mold. The strong-smelling rind is sticky and yellow; the interior is compact, with lots of holes and blue veins. Cabrales is crumbly and fragile, drier than Roquefort and less salty. It's quite strong, with a higher proportion of blue veining (which may be closer to purple in color) than other cheeses. Avoid Cabrales if the interior is turning gray. The cheese should look fresh with intense, clear purplish-blue veins rather than murky or muddy-looking veins. Be on the lookout for artisan cheeses wrapped in natural maple, oak, or sycamore leaves, rather than the more common foil wrapping.

Maytag Blue

(United States) A sharp, biting, salty flavor and crumbly texture make this hand-made Iowa cow's milk blue cheese a great choice for dips and sauces. Maytag Blue should have a creamy but crumbly texture. A light dispersion of blue veining is normal for this cheese.

Quick Gorgonzola Pasta Sauce

This rich sauce is a wonderful complement for gnocchi, fettuccine, and other hearty pastas. Try mixing in some steamed broccoli or broccolini when you toss the pasta with the sauce. *Yields 1¼ cups, enough to coat 1 lb. pasta for six servings.*

- 2 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 2 Tbs. finely chopped shallots**
- 1 tsp. ground coriander**
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**
- ½ cup heavy cream**
- ½ lb. Dolce Gorgonzola, trimmed of any rind and cut into small chunks**

In a medium saucepan, melt the butter over medium-low heat and add the shallots, coriander, and pepper. Cook until the shallots are transparent but not brown, 2 to 3 min. Add the cream and bring to a boil. Simmer gently until slightly thickened, about 5 min. Remove from the heat and stir in the Gorgonzola. Set back on the heat only long enough to melt the cheese. Toss with hot pasta, or cool and refrigerate for up to four days. Reheat gently before use.

Broiled Spiced Flank Steak with Walnut-Roquefort Butter

Quick-cooking flank steak rubbed with crushed, toasted spices and accented by this compound butter makes a simple but delicious meal served with roasted potatoes and a green vegetable. Freeze any leftover butter for another time. *Serves four.*

- 2 tsp. cumin seeds**
- 2 tsp. coriander seeds**
- 2 tsp. black peppercorns**
- ½ tsp. crushed red chile flakes**
- ¼ cup olive oil**
- 1 flank steak (about 1½ lb.), trimmed**
- 3 oz. Roquefort, crumbled**
- 4 Tbs. unsalted butter, at room temperature, cut into 2 pieces**
- ½ shallot, roughly chopped**
- ½ Tbs. finely chopped fresh thyme**
- ½ Tbs. finely chopped fresh tarragon**
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**
- ¼ tsp. coarse salt**
- 2 oz. (about ½ cup) lightly toasted walnuts**
- 2 Tbs. thinly sliced chives (optional)**

In a small, dry skillet over medium heat, toast the cumin and coriander, shaking often, until fragrant, about 1 min. Let cool. Combine with the peppercorns and chile flakes; grind briefly in a spice grinder (or pound in a mortar until still a little coarse). Combine the spices with the oil and spread evenly all over the steak. Wrap well and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or overnight.

In a food processor, combine the Roquefort, butter, shallot, thyme, tarragon, salt, and pepper. Process until smooth and creamy. Add the walnuts and process again briefly, so that the walnuts remain chunky. With a spatula, scrape the mixture onto a sheet of waxed paper or parchment and roll into a log about 1½ inches in diameter. Chill until ready to use.

Heat the broiler. Broil the steak until rare to medium rare, about 8 min. on each side, or until a meat thermometer in the thickest part of the meat registers 115° to 125°F. Remove from the broiler and allow the meat to rest for 5 to 10 min.

Cut the butter roll into thin slices. Using a very sharp knife, slice the meat across the grain into the thinnest possible slices. Arrange the steak on four heated plates and top with the butter slices. Run each plate under the broiler just long enough to melt the butter. Sprinkle with chives, if using, and serve immediately.

Stilton, Apple & Leek Tart with a Spiced Whole-Wheat Crust

Serve this tart with beer or hard cider to underscore the apples or with a semi-dry Chenin Blanc. Add a robust green salad tossed in a malt vinegar dressing to make a brewpub-style lunch. Be sure to sift the flours before measuring. Quantities for flour and butter are given by weight (ounces) and by volume (cups or tablespoons); use either measurement. *Yields one 10- or 11-inch tart; serves eight to ten.*

FOR THE TART SHELL:

- 6 oz. (1½ cups) sifted unbleached all-purpose flour**
- 2 oz. (½ cup) sifted whole-wheat flour**
- 1 tsp. ground coriander**
- ¼ tsp. ground mace**
- Pinch cayenne**
- 1 tsp. coarse salt**
- ¼ lb. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into bits and chilled**
- 4 to 6 Tbs. ice water**

FOR THE FILLING:

- 1 medium leek (about ¼ lb.)**
- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter**
- 1 medium apple (Fuji or other sweet and tart variety), unpeeled, cored, and cut into ¼-inch cubes**
- 3 large eggs**
- 1 cup half-and-half or light cream**
- ½ tsp. coarse salt**
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper**
- ¼ tsp. grated nutmeg**
- 8 oz. Stilton, trimmed of any rind and crumbled**

Make the tart shell—In a medium mixing bowl, stir together the two flours, cori-

ander, mace, cayenne, and salt. By hand or using a food processor, cut the butter into the flour mixture until the butter bits resemble oatmeal. Mix in just enough ice water to form a ball of dough (be sparing). Gently flatten the dough into a smooth disk about 1½ inches thick. Roll the dough on a lightly floured surface into a round about ⅛ inch thick. Drape the dough over the rolling pin and lift it over a 10- or 11-inch fluted tart pan with a removable bottom. Unroll it loosely over the pan and gently press the dough into the pan without stretching it. Trim any excess dough from the rim of the pan. Cover in plastic and chill for at least 1 hour.

Heat the oven to 400°F. Fit a piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil over the dough and fill it with dried beans or pie weights. Bake until the dough is cooked through but not yet browned, 20 to 25 min. Remove the foil and weights and bake until the dough is evenly and lightly browned, about another 10 min. Remove from the oven and let cool.

Make the filling—Cut off and discard the dark green top and the root end of the leek. Split the leek lengthwise into quarters and then cut crosswise into squares. Soak in a large bowl of cold water, swishing to loosen the dirt. Remove the leeks from the water using a skimmer or slotted spoon and drain.

Heat the butter in a medium skillet; add the leeks and apples. Cook over medium heat, stirring, until the leeks are brightly colored and the apples are softened, about 5 min. Remove from the heat and let cool.

Lightly beat together the eggs, half-and-half, salt, pepper, and nutmeg.

Fill and bake the tart—Heat the oven to 300°F. Cover the underside and edges of the tart pan with heavy-duty foil to prevent leaks and put the pan on a baking sheet. Distribute the leeks and apples evenly over the tart shell. Sprinkle the crumbled Stilton between the apples and leeks. Pour the custard over the top. Bake until the custard has just set in the middle, about 45 min. Let cool to room temperature before serving.

Asian Pear & Cabrales Salad with Fig & Port Dressing

Instead of ending a meal with a plate of fruit and cheese, serve this elegant winter salad made with crunchy, juicy Asian pears and figs. The long burgundy-streaked spears of radicchio di Treviso are very similar to red Belgian endive, which makes a good substitute. *Serves six.*

3 dried figs, preferably Black Mission

½ cup ruby port

Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper

6 Tbs. grapeseed oil, or another neutral salad oil

2 Tbs. cider vinegar

2 Tbs. finely chopped shallots

2 heads Belgian endive

1 head radicchio di Treviso, common red radicchio, or red Belgian endive

1 large Asian pear or barely ripe Bosc or Anjou pear

Juice of ½ lemon

½ lb. Cabrales, cut into 6 slices

Trim the stems from the figs and discard. Cut each fig into 6 to 8 pieces. In a small

saucepan, heat the port until hot to the touch, remove from the heat, and add the figs. Let the figs soak in the port until softened, about 2 hours. Put the figs and port in a food processor or blender and purée until smooth. Strain the mixture through a sieve, pushing on the solids with a spatula; discard the solids. Stir enough water (about ¼ to ⅓ cup) into the purée to thin it to a dressing consistency. Season to taste with salt and pepper; set aside.

Whisk together the oil, vinegar, and shallots. Season to taste with salt and pepper; set aside.

Cut the endive and radicchio into 1-inch wide strips, discarding the hard cores. (It isn't usually necessary to wash these salad greens.)

Remove the core from the pear, cut into thin wedges, and toss with lemon juice. Toss the endive, radicchio, and pears with the cider vinaigrette. Divide among six salad plates. Drizzle the fig and port dressing over the salads. Top each salad with a slice of Cabrales and serve immediately.

Bourbon-Marinated Buffalo Chicken Strips with Maytag Blue Dip

Instead of the traditional and now rather expensive chicken wings, I use boneless, skinless chicken thighs in my version of this popular snack. It's best to use natural, high-quality chicken. The Maytag dip can be made up to four days ahead, but definitely start this dish at least a day ahead of time to let the chicken marinate. *Yields*



drink choices

White wine, red wine—and yes, beer—can partner dishes made with blue cheese

Port, Sauternes, and hearty red wines are traditionally paired with Stilton, Roquefort, and other blue cheeses. But there are a host of other delicious possibilities when choosing wine—or even beer—for a recipe calling for one of these rich, deliciously pungent cheeses.

Slightly sweet Riesling and blue cheese is one of my very favorite food and wine combinations:

For the Asian pear and Cabrales salad, a German Kabinett or Spätlese Riesling would be heavenly, and the 2000 Franz Künstler Hochheimer Reichesthal Kabinett (\$18) would be a great choice. For the Stilton, apple, and leek tart, a semi-dry Vouvray would be delicious; try the 1999 Domaine Huet, Clos du Bourg (\$24). For the broiled spiced flank steak, go with

a multi-layered Syrah such as the 1999 Peter Lehmann Shiraz (\$15) from Australia or the 1999 Anapamu Syrah (\$13) from California's North Coast.

Both wine and beer come to mind for the Buffalo chicken thighs. Try either a spicy blend like Bonny Doon's 2000 Big House Red (\$10) from California, or a rich ale like Sierra Nevada Pale Ale. The ale's balance of

malty sweetness and hoppy bitterness is a perfect match with the multitude of spices in the recipe. Finally, a good partner for the Gorgonzola pasta sauce would be a wine with bright, youthful fruit and high acidity. I like the 2000 Rivetti Barbera Ca di Pian (\$20).

Tim Gaiser, a master sommelier, is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking.



"I've never met a blue cheese I didn't like," says Aliza Green.

2 pounds; serves four as a main dish or eight to twelve as an appetizer.

FOR THE CHICKEN:

- ¼ cup bourbon
- ¼ cup soy sauce
- ¼ cup fresh lemon juice
- 2 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs

FOR THE DIP:

- ¼ lb. Maytag Blue, crumbled
- ½ cup mayonnaise (homemade or prepared)
- ¼ cup sour cream
- 2 Tbs. cider vinegar
- ½ cup thinly sliced scallions
- 1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley
- 1 Tbs. finely chopped fresh dill
- ½ tsp. coarse salt
- ¼ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- Pinch cayenne

FOR THE SAUCE:

- ¼ cup Crystal Hot Sauce (or another brand of cayenne hot sauce such as Frank's or Duke, but not a fiery sauce like Tabasco)
- 4 Tbs. melted unsalted butter
- ¾ tsp. coarse salt
- 1 Tbs. cornstarch mixed with ¼ cup water

FOR FINISHING THE DISH:

- About 1 qt. vegetable oil for frying
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- 3 cups unbleached all-purpose flour
- 2 colored bell peppers (orange, red, or yellow), cored, seeded, and cut into ½-inch wide strips
- 1 seedless cucumber, unpeeled, cut into spears
- 1 celery heart, washed and drained, cut into sticks

Marinate the chicken—In a large bowl, combine the bourbon, soy sauce, and lemon juice. Trim and discard any visible fat on the chicken thighs. Cut each thigh lengthwise into 5 to 6 strips. Toss the strips in the bourbon mixture. Cover and refrigerate for 24 hours.

Make the dip—Blend half the cheese with the mayonnaise in a food processor until smooth. Add the sour cream and cider vinegar and process until the mixture has the consistency of creamy mayonnaise. Add the scallions, parsley, and dill and process again briefly. Add the remaining cheese, process very briefly (the dip should be slightly chunky), and remove from the

Getting to know blue cheeses

One of the best ways to familiarize yourself with the characteristics of different blue cheese varieties is to hold a comparative tasting. Buy samples of some or all of the cheeses from this story and taste them at the same time: The differences and similarities will be clear. You'll want to have some water on hand to cleanse your palate between cheeses. And to make it more fun, try tasting the cheeses along with their classic flavor partners:

- ♦ Stilton with port and walnuts.
- ♦ Gorgonzola with pears.
- ♦ Roquefort with Sauternes wine and a French baguette.
- ♦ Cabrales with red grapes or figs.
- ♦ Maytag with apples or celery.

food processor. Season to taste with salt, pepper, and cayenne. Wrap well and refrigerate for up to four days.

Make the sauce—In a small saucepan, whisk together the hot sauce, melted butter, salt, and cornstarch mixture. Heat while whisking constantly until the mixture comes to a boil. The sauce should be smooth and slightly thickened. Remove from the heat and keep warm.

Finish the dish—Heat the oven to 250°F. Pour enough oil into a wok or deep, heavy pot to reach about 2 inches. Heat the oil to 365°F or until the oil shimmers and the air 2 inches above the oil feels hot.

Drain the chicken well and pat dry with paper towels. Season the chicken with the ½ tsp. pepper. Spread the flour in a wide, shallow container and dredge one-third of the thigh strips, shaking off any excess flour. Carefully put the strips one at a time in the hot oil. Fry until the strips are golden brown, about 7 min. Remove from the oil and drain on paper towels. Repeat this process until all the chicken has been fried.

Put the fried chicken in a large bowl. Toss with the warm sauce and spread in a single layer on a baking sheet. Heat in the oven for about 5 min. so the sauce is absorbed. Serve immediately with the dip, peppers, cucumber, and celery.

Aliza Green, a Philadelphia chef, is a consultant to the restaurant industry and the author of The Bean Bible. ♦

And the Winners Are...

Sample any of these great chicken dishes and you'll see why our judges awarded them top honors in our first reader recipe contest

At *Fine Cooking*, making choices about recipes is part of the job—we do it all the time. An author submits a list of several recipes to accompany an article, we look them over, and pick the three or four that are best for the article. Simple, right? Well, try picking the best four recipes out of 400, which is what the final tally for our first reader recipe contest was.

We were highly impressed by the response, not only by the sheer volume of entries (after all, it's only the first year), but also by the creativity and sophistication of the entries. We always knew you guys were great cooks, and here was the proof.

To refresh everyone's memories, the contest was structured as a market basket challenge. Contestants had to use four out of the following five ingredients: chicken, tomatoes, cheese, mushrooms, and thyme. They could use a fairly wide range of pantry ingredients, and they could also use three wildcard ingredients of their own choice. The mission was to create a recipe appropriate for casual entertaining or a nice family meal. An interesting twist was that several people dropped the chicken and either did a vegetarian dish or substituted another type of meat, poultry, or fish—we applaud their thinking outside the proverbial box, even though the approach didn't produce a winner this time.

We spent hours poring over the recipes—scoring, rereading, categorizing, cooking—and came up with seven finalists, from which our judges chose these four winners.

All the dishes were photographed in our new studio kitchens, and we

Pot-Roasted Mediterranean Chicken

Part of this dish's bright flavor comes from preserved lemons, which are fresh lemons that have been cured in salt. You can make your own (see *Fine Cooking* #30, p. 54), or buy them in grocery or specialty shops; see Sources, p. 76. We like to serve this with couscous mixed with garlic and parsley. *Serves four.*

3½ lb. whole chicken, rinsed and dried

Sea salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste

2 sprigs fresh marjoram, 10 inches each, leaves stripped

7 sprigs fresh thyme, 4 inches each, leaves stripped

6 medium cloves garlic

5 Tbs. olive oil

1 preserved lemon (or 1 fresh lemon), sliced ½-inch thick

7 oz. pitted black olives, such as kalamata

9 oz. button mushrooms

½ cup (1½ oz.) sun-dried tomatoes, softened in very hot water

1 medium onion, cut into eighths

¾ cup dry white wine

Heat the oven to 425°F. Season the chicken inside and out with salt and pepper. Using a mini food processor, a mortar and pestle, or

a knife, mash together the marjoram, thyme, garlic, and 1 Tbs. of the olive oil to form a rough paste.

Slide your fingers between the chicken's skin and flesh to loosen the skin on the breast, thigh, and leg areas. Rub the herb paste onto the flesh under the skin so it's distributed as evenly as possible. Put half of the lemon slices, half of the olives, and one-third of the mushrooms in the cavity. Truss the bird, if you like, and put it, breast side up, in an enameled cast-iron pot or a Dutch oven. Drain the sun-dried tomatoes and arrange them around the chicken. Scatter the onion pieces and the remaining lemon slices, olives, and mushrooms around the chicken as well. Pour the white wine and the remaining ¼ cup olive oil over the vegetables around the chicken. Roast, basting every 10 min. or so with the pan juices, until an instant-read thermometer in the thigh meat reads 170°F or the juices run clear, 1 to 1¼ hours; the vegetables should be tender.

To serve, set the chicken on a carving board and spoon out the vegetables from the cavity. Defat the pan juices and serve as a sauce, if you like. Remove any trussing, carve the bird, and serve on a platter with the lemons, olives, mushrooms, onions, and tomatoes arranged around the chicken.

First prize

Miriam Fenster and Haim Schlesinger from Petach Tikva, Israel (Haim also lives in Budapest, Hungary). These two friends love to cook together and enjoy meals as a foursome with their spouses, often availing themselves of the fantastic Mediterranean fruits, vegetables, and herbs that grow in their climate (the Fensters have four types of lemon tree in their yard.)

The judges awarded this dish the highest rank because of its elegant simplicity: a straightforward preparation that produces a moist and highly flavorful chicken that's well integrated with its very tasty complementary ingredients.



Pot-Roasted Mediterranean Chicken

Runner-up

John and Whitney Anderson from Bainbridge Island, Washington. John and Whitney like to serve this dish for entertaining because the sauté can be completely made ahead and it reheats beautifully, so it lets them spend more time with friends and family.

The judges enjoyed the deep, vivid flavors of this dish and the way the earthy polenta makes a satisfying partner for the savory sauce.



Rustic Chicken with Mushrooms & Gruyère Polenta

also edited the recipes for length and for style, just as we do with recipes from our regular contributors.

All along, we jokingly hoped the first-prize winner would live nearby, since we wanted to do a photo shoot at his or her house. Well, as you can see, our first-prize winners live in Israel and Hungary! Unfortunately, at the time we produced this story, the State Department advised against travel in most of the Middle East, so we didn't have the pleasure of such an exciting road trip. (To learn more about the first-prize winners, visit our web site at www.finecooking.com.)

We congratulate the winners, and we also thank everyone who entered the contest, as well as our judges: *Fine Cooking* contributing editors Abby Dodge and Molly Stevens; chef-author Leslie Revsin; Peter Kump chef-instructor Norman Weinstein; The Culinary Institute of America's associate dean, Eve Felder; and The Taunton Press's corporate chef, Michael Louchen. The entire experience was a blast, but more important, we feel like we know our readers much better now. After having gotten into your heads via your own recipes, we'll be better able to deliver articles and recipes in future issues that suit your culinary personalities.

Martha Holmberg is the editor-in-chief of Fine Cooking.

Rustic Chicken with Mushrooms & Gruyère Polenta

This is particularly good when made with legs and thighs, as the meat gets very tender. *Serves four.*

FOR THE POLENTA:

- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 4 cups water
- 1 tsp. salt
- 1 cup medium-ground cornmeal
- 1 Tbs. chopped fresh thyme
- 1½ cups grated Gruyère

FOR THE CHICKEN:

- 2 Tbs. olive oil; more as needed
- 8 bone-in chicken pieces (3 to 4 lb. total) or one 3½ lb. chicken, cut into 8 pieces; if the breasts are large, halve them
- 1 cup sliced yellow onion
- 2 cloves garlic, minced
- 1½ cups sliced portabella mushrooms
- 1 tsp. salt
- ½ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
- ⅓ cup dry white wine
- 1½ cups canned diced tomatoes, with their juices
- ¼ cup kalamata olives, pitted and halved
- ½ cup homemade or good-quality low-salt canned chicken broth, if needed
- 2 tsp. fresh thyme, minced

To make the polenta—Heat the oven to 350°F. Coat an 8x8-inch baking dish with

the butter. In a medium saucepan, bring the water and the 1 tsp. salt to a boil and slowly whisk in the cornmeal until the mixture is smooth. Reduce the heat to a simmer and continue stirring with a wooden spoon until the mixture is thick, about 10 min. Take the pan off the heat and stir in the thyme and Gruyère. Pour the polenta into the baking dish and bake for 45 min., stirring every 10 min. or so. Meanwhile, make the chicken. (If the polenta is done before the chicken, cover with foil and stir occasionally to keep a crust from forming.)

To make the chicken—Heat the olive oil in a large sauté pan over medium-high heat, but don't let it smoke. Add as many of the chicken pieces, skin side down, as will fit without crowding and brown all sides well, 3 to 4 min. per side. Transfer to a plate, add more olive oil if needed, and brown the remaining chicken. Transfer to the plate. Reduce the heat to medium, add the onion, and sauté until translucent, about 4 min. Add the garlic and cook another 2 min. If the pan is dry, add 1 Tbs. oil. Add the mushrooms and cook until they release their juices and begin to brown, about 5 min. Add the salt and pepper. Add the wine and scrape up any browned bits in the pan. Return the chicken pieces to the pan (they should just fit in snugly) and simmer until the wine

is reduced by half, about 5 min. Add the tomatoes and olives and reduce the heat. Simmer the chicken, turning occasionally, until it's completely cooked and very tender, 30 to 40 min. Check the pan frequently and add broth as needed if the pan becomes too dry. Add 1 tsp. of the thyme to the pan.

Serve the chicken over the polenta, with some of the sauce and the remaining thyme sprinkled on top.

Chicken Breasts with Mushroom-Pancetta Stuffing & Verjus Sauce

Verjus (also called verjuice), the unfermented juice of sour grapes, is an interesting substitute for vinegar or wine. It has a sharp, fruity flavor, without overt acidity. For sources, see p. 76. If you can't find it, you can use white grape juice and cider vinegar to make the sauce, though it won't be as refined. Pancetta is unsmoked Italian bacon, usually sold in the deli department. Ask your butcher to remove the chicken breasts from the bone, keeping the skin intact (or debone them yourself; see *Fine Cooking* #45, p. 80). Try serving this chicken with roasted potatoes and sautéed spinach. Serves six.

FOR THE STUFFING:

- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 8 oz. portabella mushrooms, stems removed, caps cut into ¼-inch dice
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 2 oz. pancetta, cut into ¼-inch dice

- 1 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves
- 3 Tbs. freshly grated Parmesan
- Freshly ground black pepper to taste
- Salt to taste

FOR THE CHICKEN BREASTS:

- 6 large chicken breast halves, deboned, skin kept intact, rinsed and patted dry
- Salt and freshly ground black pepper
- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter
- 1 Tbs. olive oil

FOR THE SAUCE:

- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 2 shallots, minced (scant ¼ cup)
- ½ cup verjus (or ¼ cup white grape juice and ¼ cup cider vinegar)
- 1 cup homemade or good-quality low-salt chicken broth
- 2 tsp. flour dissolved in 2 Tbs. cold water
- ¼ tsp. fresh thyme leaves
- 1 Tbs. unsalted butter
- Salt to taste

To make the stuffing—Heat the butter in a heavy 9- or 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat. When the foam has subsided, add the diced mushrooms and chopped garlic; the skillet may seem quite full. Stir continuously for 1 min. as the mushrooms heat through and release their juices; they will shrink to fit in the pan. Spread the mixture evenly and cook for about 3 min., stirring once or twice to prevent sticking. As the liquid evaporates but before the pan

becomes completely dry, add the pancetta and stir continuously for 1 or 2 min. Add the 1 Tbs. thyme and stir for 30 seconds. Transfer the stuffing to a bowl and stir in the Parmesan and a few grindings of pepper. Taste and add salt if needed (the pancetta and Parmesan may provide all the saltiness you need). Let the stuffing cool.

To make the chicken—Heat the oven to 400°F. Cut a pocket in each breast: Lay the breast skin side down on a cutting board. Hold a 5- or 6-inch sharp, thin-bladed knife with its flat side parallel to the cutting board. About half way up and midway along the thicker side of the breast, carefully make a 1½- to 2-inch incision that goes deep into the breast but doesn't break through the opposite side. Pivot the knife forward to enlarge the pocket without widening the entry hole; remove the knife, reverse the blade, and then pivot in the opposite direction to complete the cavity. Be careful to avoid breaking through the surface of the breast.

Fill each cavity evenly with 2 Tbs. of the stuffing. Season the breasts with salt and pepper. Set a large, heavy frying pan over medium-high heat with 1 Tbs. butter and 1 Tbs. olive oil. When the fat is hot, cook the breasts (do this in batches) skin side down until golden, 4 to 5 min. Turn the

Runner-up

Brenda Gray Champion, a former Bostonian now living in London. Brenda often invites guests for dinner just to have an excuse to make recipes from *Fine Cooking*. Her inspiration for this dish was the verjus that's in all the grocery stores in London. She frequently uses diced pancetta as part of a mirepoix or stuffing, and since her husband loves mushrooms, the combination was a natural.

The judges appreciated the flavorful pan sauce and the way the sear-roasting method kept the chicken breasts moist.



Chicken Breasts with Mushroom-Pancetta Stuffing & Verjus Sauce



Balsamic Vegetable-Stuffed Roasted Chicken

Roy Liebman of New York City. Roy has been making versions of his balsamic chicken for years, ever since balsamic vinegar came on the scene. He often uses the technique of putting a stuffing under the skin of poultry to flavor and moisten the breast meat.

The judges were impressed by the vivacious flavors of this chicken, the added bonus of the extra stuffing, and the deep mahogany color the skin takes on during cooking.

breasts over and cook for 3 min. more. Transfer to an ovenproof dish large enough to hold all the breasts skin side up without touching; keep warm under foil while cooking the remaining breasts. Don't rinse the skillet; you'll need it for the sauce.

Put the chicken in the oven and roast until an instant-read thermometer inserted deeply into the meat reads 160°F, 10 to 15 min. The breasts will be plump and firm, yet will still yield a bit to the touch when cooked through.

Make the sauce—While the chicken is in the oven, remove all but 1 Tbs. of the fat from the skillet and set it over medium heat. Add the minced garlic and shallots and sauté until softened but not browned, 1 to 2 min. Add the verjus (or the grape juice and cider vinegar) and turn the heat to high. Scrape up the browned bits in the pan and reduce the liquid to about 2 Tbs., 3 to 4 min. Add the chicken broth and continue to cook on high heat until reduced to about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup, 2 to 3 min. To thicken, add the flour and water mixture (through a sieve to prevent lumps) while stirring; add the $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. thyme and 1 Tbs. butter and cook for another 2 min., reducing the heat if necessary to slow the reduction. Taste for salt. Keep warm while finishing the chicken.

Cut the chicken breasts crosswise into 1-inch slices. Spoon 1 to 2 Tbs. of the sauce over each serving.

Balsamic Vegetable-Stuffed Roasted Chicken

The balsamic vinegar in the stuffing causes the chicken to become very dark as it roasts. It may look burned, but it won't be—it will taste delicious, and the skin will be very crisp from the high heat. For the best results, dice the vegetables as finely and consistently as you can. You can make the stuffing and store it at room temperature up to two hours ahead. *Serves four.*

2½ Tbs. unsalted butter
 $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. white mushrooms, thinly sliced
1½ Tbs. olive oil
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup finely diced onion
1 cup finely diced carrot
1 cup finely diced celery
5 oil-packed sun-dried tomatoes, chopped
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup balsamic vinegar
2 Tbs. minced fresh rosemary, plus two 2-inch sprigs
 $\frac{1}{2}$ Tbs. minced fresh thyme
Coarse salt and freshly ground black pepper
 $3\frac{1}{2}$ lb. whole chicken

Heat the oven to 500°F. In a skillet large enough to hold all the vegetables, melt 1 Tbs. of the butter over medium heat. Add the mushrooms and sauté until they're lightly browned and any liquid they release has evaporated, 8 to 10 min. Transfer to a small bowl.

In the same skillet, melt the remaining $1\frac{1}{2}$ Tbs. butter with the olive oil over medium heat. Add the onion and sauté until slightly wilted, 3 to 5 min. Add the carrot and celery; continue sautéing until they start to soften, about 5 min. Add the sun-dried tomatoes, vinegar, minced rosemary, thyme, and reserved mushrooms. Stir briefly to combine, reduce the heat to low, cover, and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables have absorbed all the liquid, 15 to 20 min. Season to taste with salt and pepper and let cool slightly.

Meanwhile, rinse the chicken well inside and out and pat dry thoroughly with paper towels. Combine 1 Tbs. salt with $\frac{1}{2}$ Tbs. pepper and season the chicken inside and out with this mixture. Put the rosemary sprigs in the cavity. Set the chicken, breast side up, on a rack in a roasting pan. Using your fingers, carefully separate the skin from the chicken breast and use your fingers to stuff a thin layer of the vegetables under the breast skin (you'll use about $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 cup); be careful not to tear the skin. Stuff the remaining vegetables into the cavity. Tuck the wing tips back and tie the legs together loosely.

Roast the chicken on the lowest oven rack with the legs pointing to the back of the oven at 500°F for 15 min. Reduce the temperature to 450°F and roast until an instant-read thermometer in the thickest part of the thigh reads 170°F, another 30 to 45 min.

Transfer the chicken to a cutting board, tent with foil, and let it rest for 10 min. Untie the legs and spoon the stuffing from the cavity into the center of a warm serving platter. Cut the chicken into quarters and arrange around the stuffing. Serve immediately. ♦

Best-Selling Lemon Bars

These delightful squares feature an extra tart and thick topping that cooks quickly on the stovetop

BY JOANNE CHANG

I jokingly consider myself an expert on lemon bars because I ate them every single workday for a year during my first job as a baker. I started each morning by cutting up a tray of lemon bars. My boss insisted that I throw away any bar that wasn't deemed perfect. I usually just ate them instead. After a year of eating overcooked, undercooked, too tart, too creamy, too sweet, not-just-right lemon bars, I learned the nuances of them all.

Now I have my own bakery, and we can't seem to make lemon bars fast enough. We make a tart lemon curd filling that has a little cream and butter mixed in to temper the sharpness of the lemon. We pour the curd over a layer of rich, crumbly shortbread, and then we bake until just set. When cool, the bars are cut into pieces and served. The con-



A tart lemon curd starts on the stovetop



Whisk constantly and pour slowly. Adding a hot lemon juice mixture to cold eggs very gradually “tempers” the eggs and keeps them from curdling.



A line says it's done. The curd thickens in minutes on the stovetop; when your finger leaves a line on a utensil, remove the curd from the heat and strain.

trast of tart filling and buttery shortbread appeals to everyone.

I must confess, though, that this recipe didn't start out as a lemon bar. It was originally a lemon tart—a very delicious tart that my customers wouldn't buy. I decided to change the presentation to squares (perhaps the tart looked too formal?), and I ended up with a best seller. They're not your classic, thin lemon bars with a dusting of confectioners' sugar, but that doesn't seem to matter. These lemon bars fly out the door.

Start with a rich, buttery shortbread

That same perfectionist boss developed a foolproof recipe for shortbread that I now use as the base for my lemon bars. Great shortbread should be tender and rich and have a wonderful, melt-in-your-mouth quality. I cream room-temperature butter with two kinds of sugar: granulated, which aerates the butter and makes a lighter shortbread; and confectioners', which dissolves quickly and makes a more tender pastry. Then I add a combination of all-purpose flour and cake flour; the all-purpose provides strength, while the softer cake flour ensures tenderness.

A trick we use in the bakery is to line the baking pan with parchment, letting an inch or two extend past the sides of the pan. This makes it easy to remove the bars from the pan once they've cooled to room temperature. If you don't have parchment, just grease your pan with butter. It will be a little trickier to re-

move the bars, and you may have to sacrifice a bar or two in order to wedge in a spatula.

Pour on a tart lemon curd

Classic lemon bars usually call for a mixture of lemon juice, eggs, and sugar to be poured onto the baked shortbread and then baked again so the topping thickens. Instead, I use lemon curd as my topping because I like its thick, smooth, custardy texture. This recipe makes an intensely lemony, refreshingly tart curd that marries well with the buttery shortbread base. The ingredients are the same, but the curd is fully cooked on the stovetop to thicken it. Only then is it poured over the shortbread and baked.

Bake until they wiggle like jello

These bars are a breeze to put together. You simply pour the curd on the baked shortbread and bake again until the curd is just set. The way to check if the bars are finished baking is with the “wobble test.” When you jiggle the pan, the curd should wiggle like firm jello—anything looser and your lemon bars will fall apart once you cut them; if they don't wiggle at all, then the bars might be overcooked and grainy.

Let the baked bars cool to room temperature and then transfer them to a board and refrigerate. If you refrigerate them while they're still warm, the topping may crack. Give the bars at least four hours to firm up in the fridge and then cut them into squares.



Hot curd meets hot shortbread. The lemon bars finish cooking in the oven, where the curd bakes until it jiggles like firm jello.

RECIPE

Lemon Bars

These bars will last several days in the refrigerator in an airtight container but are best when fresh. The recipe can be doubled. The quantities for flour and butter are given by weight (ounces) and by volume (cups or tablespoons); use either measurement. *Yields sixteen 1½-inch bars; 2½ cups curd.*

FOR THE SHORTBREAD:

4 oz. (8 Tbs.) unsalted butter, at room temperature
2 Tbs. granulated sugar
1 Tbs. confectioners' sugar
½ tsp. vanilla extract
2¼ oz. (½ cup) all-purpose flour
2½ oz. (⅔ cup) cake flour
¼ tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. salt

FOR THE LEMON CURD:

1 cup fresh lemon juice (from 4 to 6 lemons)
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into 2 pieces
2 Tbs. heavy cream
1 cup granulated sugar
4 large eggs
2 large egg yolks
¼ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. vanilla extract

To make the shortbread—In a large bowl, cream together the butter and both sugars with a hand-held mixer on medium speed (or mix by hand with a wooden spoon) until light and fluffy, about 5 min. Beat in the vanilla until thoroughly combined, scraping down the sides of the bowl.

In a medium bowl, sift together both flours, the baking powder, and the salt. With the mixer on low speed, slowly blend the dry ingredients into the wet ingredients, scraping down the sides, until the flour is completely blended and the dough is homogenous.

Scrape the dough from the bowl onto a sheet of plastic. Wrap well and press down to form a ½-inch-thick square. Refrigerate the dough until it's firm but still pliable, about 20 min. Heat the oven to 350°F. Prepare two sheets of parchment or waxed paper, each at least 11x11 inches. If using waxed paper, grease an 8x8-inch metal or glass baking pan with butter.

When the dough is firm, unwrap it and put it between the sheets of parchment or paper. Roll the dough to an approximate square, slightly larger than 8x8 inches and about ¼ inch thick. Remove the top sheet of parchment or paper, trim the dough with a dull knife to an 8x8-inch square, and, if using parchment, put it and the dough into an 8x8-inch baking pan. If using waxed paper, flip the dough into the greased pan and peel off the paper. Press the dough into the bottom of the pan, letting the excess parchment come up the sides (trim it to about 1 inch above the rim). The dough should be an even thickness all around but it needn't be perfectly smooth. Bake until the shortbread is light golden on top, 25 to 30 min.; in a glass pan, look for a golden brown color on the bottom. Remove the pan from the oven, but keep the heat set to 350°F as you make the lemon curd.

To make the lemon curd—In a medium saucepan, heat the lemon juice, butter, and cream to just under a boil; the butter should be melted. Remove from the heat.

In a medium bowl, whisk together by hand the sugar, eggs, and yolks until combined. Whisk in a bit of the hot liquid and then gradually whisk in a bit more until it's all added. This technique, called tempering, heats the eggs slowly and gently so they don't curdle.

Pour the mixture back into the saucepan and heat on medium, stirring constantly with a wooden spoon, scraping the bottom and sides of the pan to keep the eggs from scrambling. Cook until the lemon curd coats the spoon thickly enough to leave a line when you draw your finger through, 5 to 8 min. Remove from the heat and strain through a fine sieve. Stir in the salt and vanilla.

To finish—Pour the curd over the baked shortbread and smooth it evenly with a spatula, if needed. Bake until the curd has set and jiggles like firm jello, 15 to 20 min. Let cool to room temperature. Gently tug on the parchment on all sides to loosen the bars from the pan. Lift them out and onto a cutting board and refrigerate until the curd has completely set, at least 4 hours. Trim the sides for a cleaner look and cut into 16 pieces.

Pastry chef Joanne Chang owns Flour, a bakery and café in Boston. ♦

Do-ahead tip

Shortbread dough can be wrapped in plastic and frozen for up to two months. When you want to make lemon bars (or any other shortbread-based recipe), just let the dough thaw overnight in the refrigerator.

Braising Meat So It's Meltingly Tender

Follow this flexible, step-by-step method for fall-apart-tender meat with its own rich sauce

BY TOM COLICCHIO
WITH CATHERINE YOUNG

I grew up eating my mother's chicken cacciatore, meatballs in sauce, and beef stew. These dishes, like many home classics, are all braised. Of course, I didn't think about that when I was a kid, or even when I began cooking in restaurants in the 1980s. Braising was out of style then. Fast cooking methods like grilling, juicing, frizzling, and fusing were getting all the attention. Modern haute cuisine had no place for gentle simmers, slow roasts, or other traditional relaxed cooking techniques.

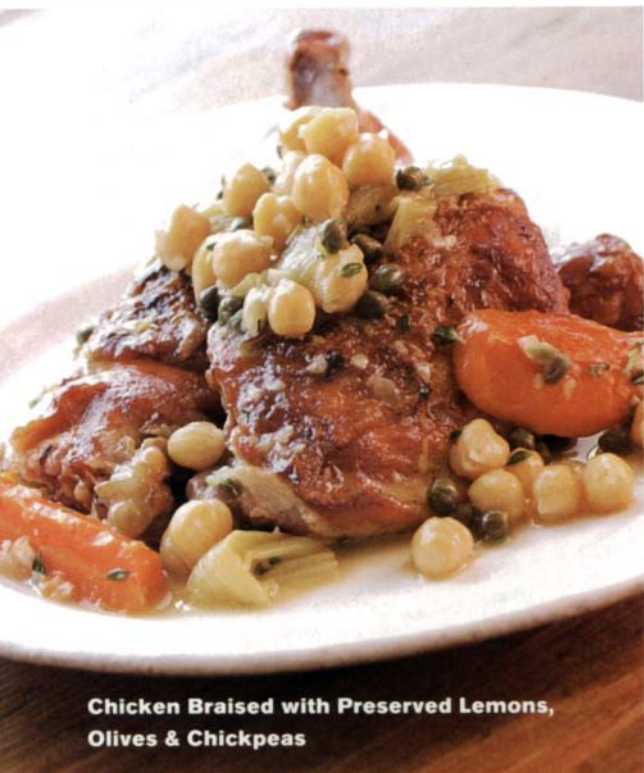
Oh yeah?

I first realized how much I was missing by ignoring braising, the most grand of the old techniques, soon after I became the chef at Mondrian in New York City. I was working on creating a dish that built layers of texture and deep flavor. I wanted subtlety, not flash.

I wanted to cook a whole baby lamb. I knew immediately that I would roast the legs, loin, and rack. But I was initially at a loss as to what to do with the remaining tougher cuts of the animal. Then it struck me—the shanks and shoulders would be perfect braised. I served the roasted rack and the slowly simmered shanks together with a sauce made from the braising liquid. The dish was a hit, but more important, I had rediscovered braising.

Short Ribs Braised with Rosemary, Garlic & Sherry





Chicken Braised with Preserved Lemons, Olives & Chickpeas



Lamb Shanks Braised with Tomatoes, Fennel & Coriander

One method, great results.

By following the steps for successful braising on pp. 58–59, you can create custom dishes—using the meat and flavorings of your choice—as diverse and delicious as those pictured here.

In menu after menu, first at Mondrian, then at Gramercy Tavern, and now at Craft, I seek meltingly tender renditions of once-overlooked cuts of meat like pork shoulder, lamb shanks, and beef ribs. These days, I'm so complete a devotee that I've created a special section of the menu just for braised meats.

What exactly is a braise?

Braising is a method of cooking meats (or fish or vegetables) surrounded by a flavorful broth so the muscle (or vegetable fiber) becomes succulent and tender.

In this article, I'm focusing on what's called brown braising: The meat is browned before it's simmered in broth. As the broth simmers, it exchanges flavors with the meat. The broth also reduces and thickens slightly, a process that transforms it into a richly flavored, satisfying sauce.

Braising is a technique found in almost every cuisine. The basic method and meat cuts don't vary too much across borders. What does change is the cook's choice of aromatic vegetables, cooking liquids, and finishing garnishes. The seven-step chart on pp. 58–59 gives you the general method plus lots of ingredient options to help you create your own braise. For a few specific examples of great



Pork Shoulder Braised with Apple Cider, Thyme & Tomatoes

combinations, see the chart on p. 60, which offers four of my favorite braises.

The toughest cuts become the most tender when braised

A good braise begins by choosing the right cut of meat. I always reach for the tough but flavorful working parts of an animal. In four-legged animals, this means legs, shoulders, ribs, and even tails. In birds, it means thighs, legs, and wings. These cuts contain soft protein and fat, just as lean, tender meats do, but they also have sinew and connective

tissue. This tissue contains collagen, which must cook to about 200°F before it will soften. When you braise meat in a gently simmering liquid, the collagen melts into gelatin, which then bastes the meat to produce a forkably tender result. Braising would ruin a lean, naturally tender sirloin, but it's perfect for tough, collagen-rich cuts like lamb shanks, beef short ribs, pork shoulder, and chicken legs.

Cooking tough cuts slowly not only makes them tender but also makes them taste better. The longer you expose protein to heat, the more flavor you can produce. It takes two to three hours in simmering

Seven steps to a delicious braise

Here's the process for braising just about any kind of meat or poultry, broken down into steps. Under each step is a list of ingredients you can choose from as you create your own braises. See the four examples on p. 60 for guidance on quantities.

1

Brown the meat

Add enough oil to a Dutch oven or high-sided skillet to coat the bottom. Heat over medium or medium high. Season the meat with salt and pepper. Brown it on all sides in batches; transfer to a plate. Pour off all but a few tablespoons of fat from the pan.

Meats

ribs: beef short ribs or country-style pork ribs
shanks: lamb, veal, or beef
shoulder, bone-in or boneless: pork, beef (chuck), or lamb
legs: chicken or duck
rump: beef or veal bottom round, oxtail
beef brisket
any stew meat



Choose a wide, deep skillet or a Dutch oven. Tom Colicchio browns the meat in batches for a good sear.

2

Cook the aromatics

Reduce the heat to medium and cook the aromatics in the braising pan until the vegetables are tender and perhaps just starting to brown.

Aromatics

Sliced or chopped:
onions or leeks (white part only)
carrots
celery or fennel



Sweat aromatic vegetables to draw out flavor. When soft and tender, add other flavorings.

3

Add the flavorings

Stir in any herbs and other flavorings and cook a minute more. If you're adding vinegar or wine, let it simmer until it reduces by about half.

Flavorings

Choose a few of the following:

fresh herbs, such as thyme, rosemary, or tarragon
garlic cloves (smashed or chopped)
bay leaves
lemon zest
dried chiles, such as ancho or Anaheim
sliced mushrooms, such as cremini, shiitake, or button
canned tomatoes
chopped anchovies
capers
soy sauce
curry
spices
sherry, dry red wine, or port
cider vinegar or red-wine vinegar

liquid for a lamb shank to reach an internal temperature of 200°F, all the better for deep flavor.

One pan will do—a Dutch oven is perfect

Pick a pan that will hold the meat and vegetables snugly. Yes, I said snugly. When you brown meat or sauté vegetables, the food needs lots of room in the pan so it sears instead of steams. But when you're braising, you want as little extra space as possible. A tight fit keeps the cooking nice and slow and regulates the reduction of the cooking liquid. The pan should also have fairly high sides so it can hold

enough liquid to surround (though not submerge) the meat. At home, I like to braise in a large, deep cast-iron skillet. A Dutch oven or deep casserole will also work well.

For looks and flavor, don't rush the browning

Brown braises always start by searing the meat in fat until it's nicely browned on all sides. Unfortunately, this essential step is often rushed. You should always:

♦ **Brown in small batches.** You'll sear the meat in the same snug pot or pan that you're going to braise

4

Add the cooking liquid

Return the meat to the pot, and add enough liquid to barely cover. Bring to a gentle simmer on the stovetop before transferring the pot to the oven.

Liquids

stock or broth (chicken, beef, veal, vegetable)
water
tomato sauce (homemade)
apple cider, as a supplement



Add liquid to surround, not submerge. Some of the meat should poke above the surface.

5

Braise the meat

Braise uncovered in a 350°F oven, basting and turning the meat occasionally. Adjust the heat as necessary to maintain a gentle simmer (barely bubbling). The meat is done when it's tender enough to cut with a fork and easily comes away from the bone, 1½ to 4 hours.

Approximate cooking time

ribs: 2½ hours
shanks: 2½ hours
shoulder
 bone-in: 4 hours
 boneless: 1½ hours
chicken legs: 1½ hours
rump: 2½ hours
brisket: 2½ hours
stew meat: 1½ hours

6

Reduce the sauce

Transfer the meat to a plate, let the liquid cool, and spoon off any fat. (For a smooth, refined sauce, strain the liquid.) Bring the sauce—strained or not—to a simmer and reduce until it thickens enough to coat the back of a spoon. Return the meat to the pot.

Serve now, or reserve for later

At this point, the braise can be served right away, refrigerated for up to five days, or frozen for up to three months.

7

Warm and garnish

When ready to serve, warm the meat in the sauce, basting frequently, and stir in any finishing garnishes.

Garnishes

chopped parsley, cilantro, or other fresh tender herbs
capers
chopped olives
chopped roasted red bell peppers
roasted garlic
grated lemon zest
cooked beans, such as white beans or chickpeas
roasted tomatoes
cooked potatoes



One-pot wonder. From browning the meat to adding the garnishes, braises need just one pan.

it in, but as I've just explained, crowding the pan during this first step would inhibit good browning. So be sure to give the meat the room it needs by browning in batches.

♦ **Use medium or medium-high heat.** Choose the heat according to what else you're doing in the kitchen. Medium gives a slightly deeper caramelization and therefore a somewhat more richly flavored sauce. Medium high (never high) saves time but requires more attention to prevent burning.

♦ **Have patience.** Browning the meat will take 20 to 45 minutes, depending on the size of the pieces of meat and the size of your pan. This is definitely the aspect of braising that requires the most attention, but the payoff for doing it right is a deeply flavored sauce.

Sauté a flavor base of onions, carrots, and celery

Once you've browned the meat, remove it from the pan so you can cook the aromatic vegetables, which are usually onions or leeks, carrots, and celery. Some braises call for the vegetables to cook until they've softened but haven't browned, which is called sweating, and others might require you to brown them. Either way is fine, but make sure that the vegetables have softened fully and released all of their sweet juices into the pan. These juices add another layer of flavor to the final dish.

At this point, you can push the braise in whatever direction you want with the addition of more flavors. The field is wide open here, but the chart below will give you some ideas. Ingredients like

A few of my favorite braises

You can make these exact recipes or use them as models for your own creations.

Meats & timing	Aromatics	Flavorings	Liquids	Garnishes
SHORT RIBS BRAISED WITH ROSEMARY, GARLIC, AND SHERRY				
6 lb. short ribs, seasoned with salt and pepper (cooks in about 2½ hours; serves six)	Chopped carrots, leeks, onions, and celery to total 2 cups	1 cup sherry vinegar 6 smashed cloves garlic 5 sprigs fresh thyme 4 sprigs fresh rosemary	Chicken stock to barely cover, about 5 cups	½ cup oil-cured or niçoise olives, pitted and chopped ¼ cup diced soppressata (Italian cured salami) 1 Tbs. chopped fresh rosemary leaves
CHICKEN LEGS BRAISED WITH PRESERVED LEMONS, OLIVES, AND CHICKPEAS				
6 lb. chicken legs, seasoned with salt and pepper (cooks in about 1½ hours; serves six)	Chopped carrots, leeks, onions, and celery to total 2 cups	5 sprigs fresh thyme 3 smashed cloves garlic 2 Tbs. chopped preserved lemon or 2 tsp. grated lemon zest 1 tsp. ground cardamom	Chicken stock to barely cover, about 5 cups	½ cup oil-cured or niçoise olives, pitted and quartered 6 Tbs. chopped preserved lemon or 2 Tbs. grated lemon zest ¼ cup capers, roughly chopped
LAMB SHANKS BRAISED WITH TOMATOES, FENNEL, AND CORIANDER				
6 lb. lamb shanks, seasoned with salt and pepper (cooks in about 2½ hours; serves six)	3 cups sliced onions	2 Tbs. chopped garlic 2 Tbs. chopped ginger 1 tsp. fennel seed 1 tsp. coriander seed 1 tsp. cumin seed 1 tsp. mustard seed ½ tsp. ground cardamom Pinch cayenne	2 cups canned tomatoes (chopped or not), with juices Chicken stock to barely cover, about 3 cups	½ cup cooked chickpeas 2 Tbs. chopped fresh cilantro 1 Tbs. toasted ground cumin or 1 tsp. toasted cumin seed
PORK SHOULDER BRAISED WITH APPLE CIDER, THYME, AND TOMATOES				
1½ lb. boneless pork shoulder, seasoned with salt, pepper, and crushed red pepper (cooks in about 1½ hours; serves four to six)	1 large onion, sliced 1 bulb fennel, sliced	2 cups cider vinegar 5 sprigs fresh thyme 3 sliced cloves garlic 1 tsp. crushed red pepper or to taste	4 cups chicken stock 2 cups apple cider 2 cups canned tomatoes Water to cover	2 Tbs. fresh thyme leaves Roasted garlic cloves to taste

herbs, spices, peppers, citrus, mushrooms, tomatoes, and garlic are all excellent choices.

**Pick a liquid you like—
it's the backbone of your final sauce**

You've also got some flexibility with the cooking liquid. It can be water or stock or tomato sauce, or a combination. Sometimes I use wine or vinegar as part of the cooking liquid, but I really consider these more as flavor boosters than as braising mediums (which is why they're in the flavorings column in the chart). When I do use wine or vinegar, I like to reduce them somewhat before adding other liquids.

You need to add enough liquid to surround but not submerge the meat—it should just barely skim the meat's surface. The liquid will reduce as you braise, concentrating the flavor of the sauce and letting the meat cook without poaching.

Braise in the oven or on the stovetop. The goal is to allow the

liquid to simmer slowly; don't let it creep to a boil or the meat will cook too rapidly and dry out before it gets fully tender. In the oven, 350°F usually gives a nice simmer. On the stovetop, medium heat is usually about right. I prefer the oven for most braises. First, it frees the top of the stove for other projects. Second, I like to braise uncovered. This is a little unconventional, but I find it works very well. Covering the pan cooks the meat with steam, which speeds the process but produces less flavorful meat and sauce. Uncovered oven braising also allows the exposed meat to roast and brown. It does mean that you should turn the meat occasionally during cooking to ensure even browning and moist meat.

The liquid should bubble gently. If it's too active, turn down the heat, and if it's too quiet, turn it up. Also, use the opportunity to baste the meat and, if it looks like it's getting dry, turn it. Braising doesn't require constant supervision, but the best braise is the result of continued awareness.

The meat is done when it's tender enough to cut with a fork and begins to pull away from the bone. Let the broth cool to room temperature and then remove the meat from the pan. You'll need to defat the sauce, easily done with a gravy separator. If you don't have one, skim off the fat with a spoon. At work, I strain the sauce for a more refined look, but at home, straining isn't so critical (but do remove any herb stems, bay leaves, or other inedibles). An unstrained sauce will have a relaxed, rustic texture. Either way, reduce the liquid enough so that it's a little viscous, transforming it from a broth to a sauce.

Braises are even better the next day

You can serve the braise right away, but I usually make it a day ahead. Be sure to refrigerate the meat in the sauce so it absorbs more flavor and doesn't dry out. Freezing the braise is also an option.

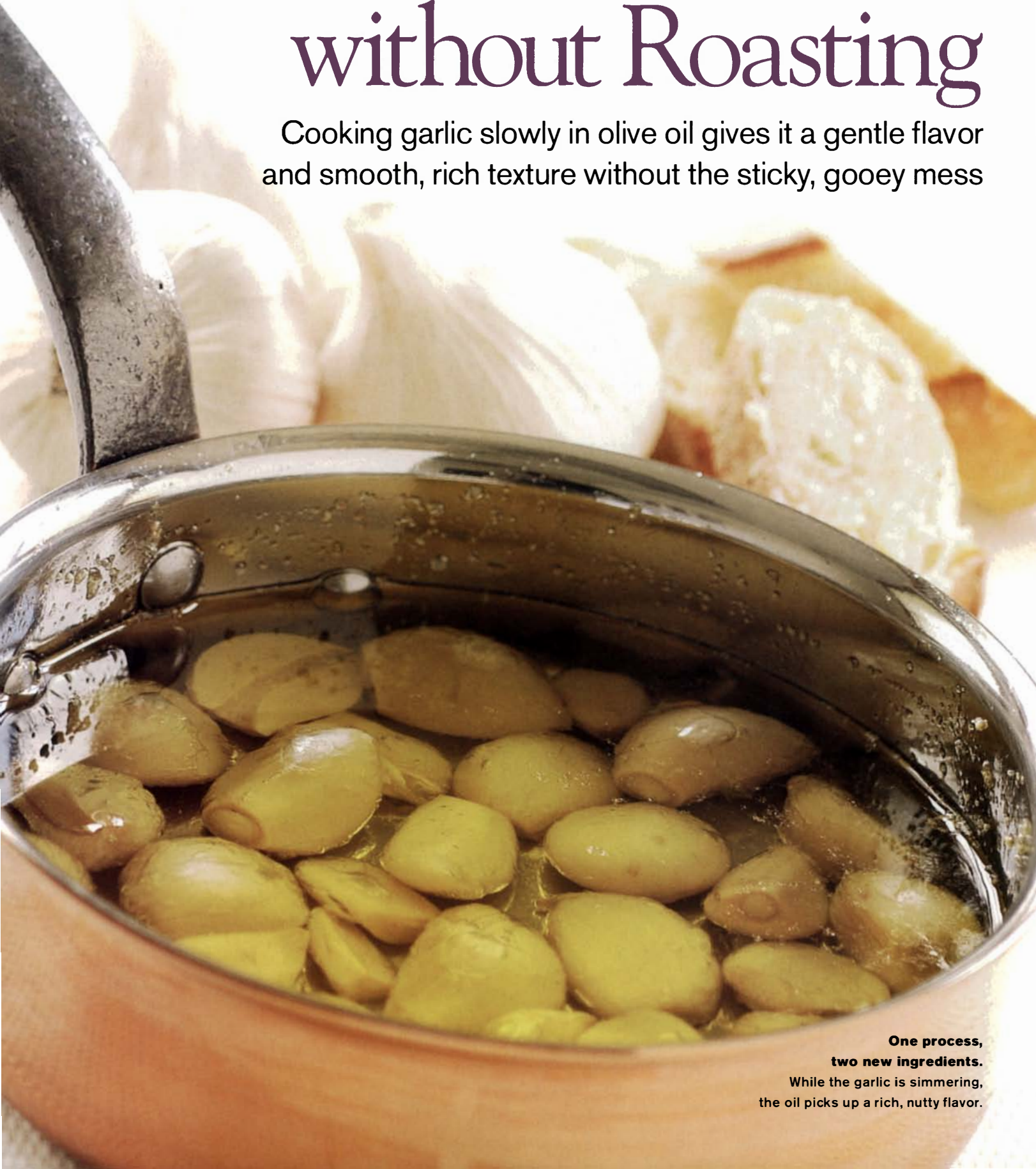
When I'm ready to serve the dish, I warm the meat in the sauce, basting it frequently, and let the sauce reduce some more—enough to coat the back of a wooden spoon. You can serve the braise as it is or add more garnishing vegetables, herbs, or other ingredients to give a fresh lift to the flavor. I might stir in nicely cut versions of the same vegetables that I cooked with the meat, or I might decide to layer in flavor with a more involved garnish, such as braised artichokes or roasted tomatoes.

Tom Colicchio is the chef-owner of Gramercy Tavern and Craft in New York City. Catherine Young is a freelance food writer. ♦



Mellow Garlic without Roasting

Cooking garlic slowly in olive oil gives it a gentle flavor and smooth, rich texture without the sticky, gooey mess



**One process,
two new ingredients.**

While the garlic is simmering,
the oil picks up a rich, nutty flavor.

BY TONY ROSENFELD

As good as most things with garlic taste, it's the aftereffect that I often remember most. Like the annoying Energizer bunny, garlic can keep on beating long after a meal is done. It's not that I could ever live without garlic—flecked across roasting chicken or puréed in gazpacho, its sharp bite sparks a dish to life. But in preparations with more subtle intentions, I look for a kinder, gentler flavor.

Roasting garlic seems the obvious solution. And I was content with this until restaurant work introduced me to the merits of cooking garlic slowly in oil. This produces the same desirable results as roasting—mellow flavor and a smooth, rich texture—but in a more efficient manner. You peel a bulb's worth of garlic and then gently simmer it in oil on the stovetop. In about half an hour, you have soft, spreadable cloves and an almost nutty infused oil.

I keep oil-cooked garlic handy to liven up even the most mundane of weeknight meals, using the slow-cooked cloves as other cooks might butter, to add a slight kick of body or richness. Their smooth texture makes them a flexible accompaniment; you can mash the cloves with a spoon and add them to a vegetable purée, stir them into a quick pan sauce, or spread them thinly on slices of warm, crusty bread. Unlike its loud raw counterpart, slow-cooked garlic revels in such treatment, mildly acquiescing to its surroundings.

The infused garlic oil is just as adaptable; it's perfect for marinating meats. You can also toss the oil with pasta and Parmesan, or serve it before a meal on its own with good, crusty bread (see the sidebar at right for more ideas).

Peeling a bulb's worth of garlic cloves is not the most enviable of tasks, but it's not as tedious as it may seem. I put the individual cloves in a bowl, pour very hot water (tap water will do) over them, and agitate the mixture with a metal whisk. The hot water and movement both soften and loosen the skins. I drain off the water and then easily remove the skins with a paring knife.

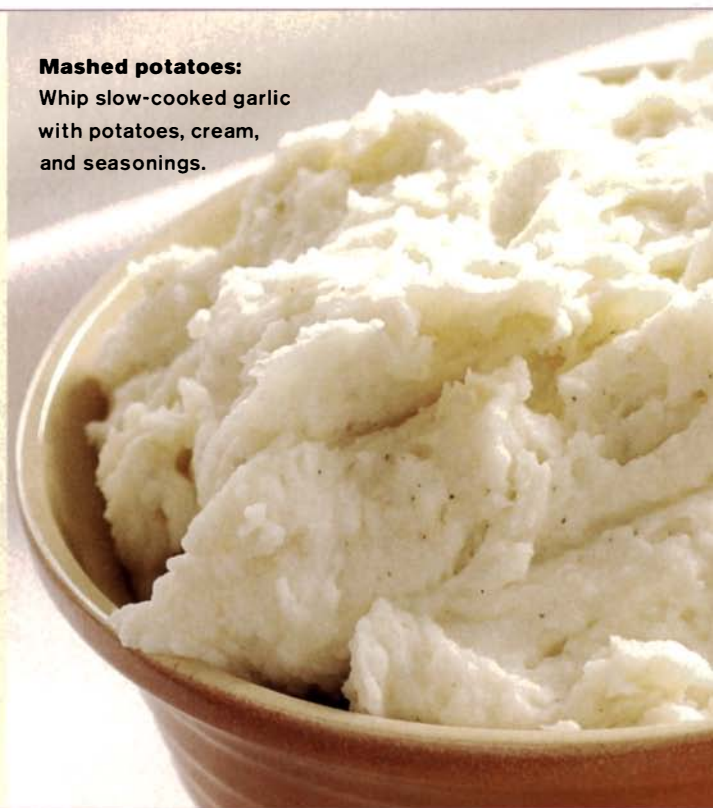
I've found that extra-virgin olive oil produces the most intensely flavored result. Grapeseed and

Using the garlic

- ◆ Spread cloves across crisped baguette rounds, along with roasted red peppers, black olives, and fresh thyme for crostini.
- ◆ Purée cloves with parsley, lemon zest, and garlic oil and spread across cod fillets before broiling.
- ◆ Substitute for fresh garlic in meatloaf.
- ◆ Wilt spinach in garlic oil; toss with a smashed clove at the end of cooking.
- ◆ Spread two cloves under the skin of a chicken, along with orange zest and fresh thyme, before roasting.
- ◆ Purée cloves with goat cheese, roasted eggplant, and fresh basil for a cool summertime dip.

Mashed potatoes:

Whip slow-cooked garlic with potatoes, cream, and seasonings.

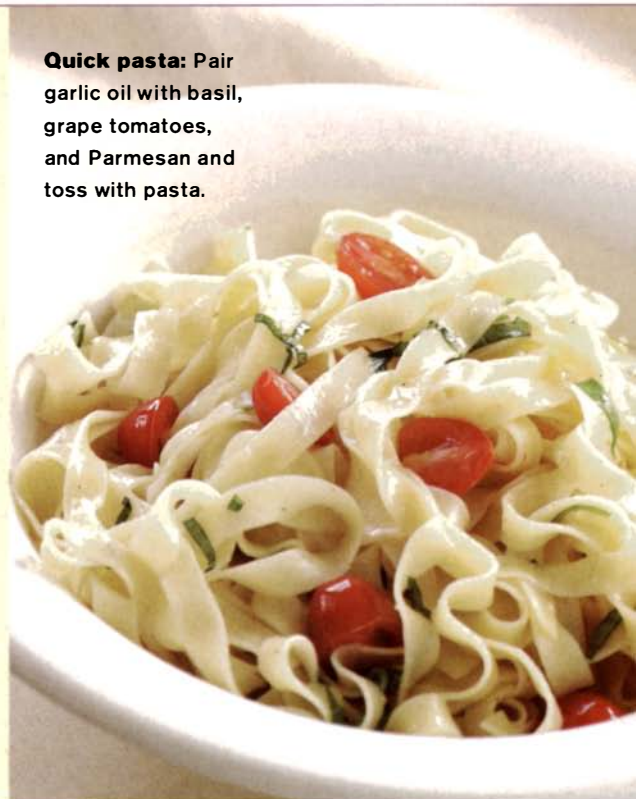


Using the oil

The oil is as multi-useful as the garlic, so experiment. Just don't use the oil for high-heat cooking, like sautéing; low-heat use is fine.

- ◆ Vinaigrettes: Emulsify the oil with grainy mustard, sherry vinegar, and fresh tarragon.
- ◆ Chicken marinade: Cover chicken with the oil and fresh thyme and let sit overnight, refrigerated.
- ◆ Basting sauce: Mix the oil with balsamic vinegar and then brush on grilled vegetables or meats.
- ◆ A finishing touch: Drizzle the oil on grilled lamb or sautéed vegetables before serving.

Quick pasta: Pair garlic oil with basil, grape tomatoes, and Parmesan and toss with pasta.



Using slow-cooked garlic instead of raw

On some occasions and with some foods, the subtler influences of slow-cooked garlic is preferable to the sharp flavor and potentially badgering effects of its raw form (see the examples that follow). When substituting slow-cooked garlic for raw garlic, the proportions vary according to personal taste; I use about twice as much as I would raw.

- ◆ hummus
- ◆ guacamole
- ◆ garlic butter
- ◆ garlic bread
- ◆ pesto
- ◆ Caesar salad
- ◆ ranch dressing
- ◆ stuffed mushrooms



An easier way to peel a lot of garlic. Agitate raw, unpeeled cloves in hot water. Sharp whisking loosens the skins.



Grab the loosened skin with a paring knife. The skin should pull off easily.

canola oils also work well, as their light consistencies and flavors highlight the garlic.

The garlic must be completely enveloped in the oil. Consequently, the amount of oil in the recipe varies according to the size of your smallest saucepan (the smaller the pot, the less oil you'll need). It takes a little over a cup of oil to cover a bulb's worth of garlic in the worn six-inch pot I favor in my kitchen. With the garlic submerged in oil, I set my small trusty pot over a low flame, the lowest on my stovetop. I leave the oil to simmer for 30 minutes, checking every so often to make sure that the oil doesn't get too hot. It's best to have the oil's temperature hover around 210°F, hot enough to cook the garlic, but not to brown or fry it.

As the water in the garlic cooks off, a steady stream of small bubbles rises to the oil's surface. If the bubbling turns into more of a boil and the oil appears to be getting too hot, I remove the pot from the flame for a minute or two before returning it to the heat. After about 20 minutes, the garlic will begin to turn translucent as it cooks. After about a total of 35 minutes of cooking, the cloves will begin to dull again to an opaque, solid color. They should be soft enough to split with a metal spoon, and the oil will be deeply aromatic.

I let the oil and the garlic cloves cool together so the flavors continue to develop before I separate them into jars and store them in the refrigerator, where they'll keep for at least a week.

RECIPE

Garlic Slow-Cooked in Oil

You may increase the amount of garlic in this recipe by simply adding enough oil to cover the additional cloves. The garlic oil can be reused to slow-cook more garlic another one or two times.

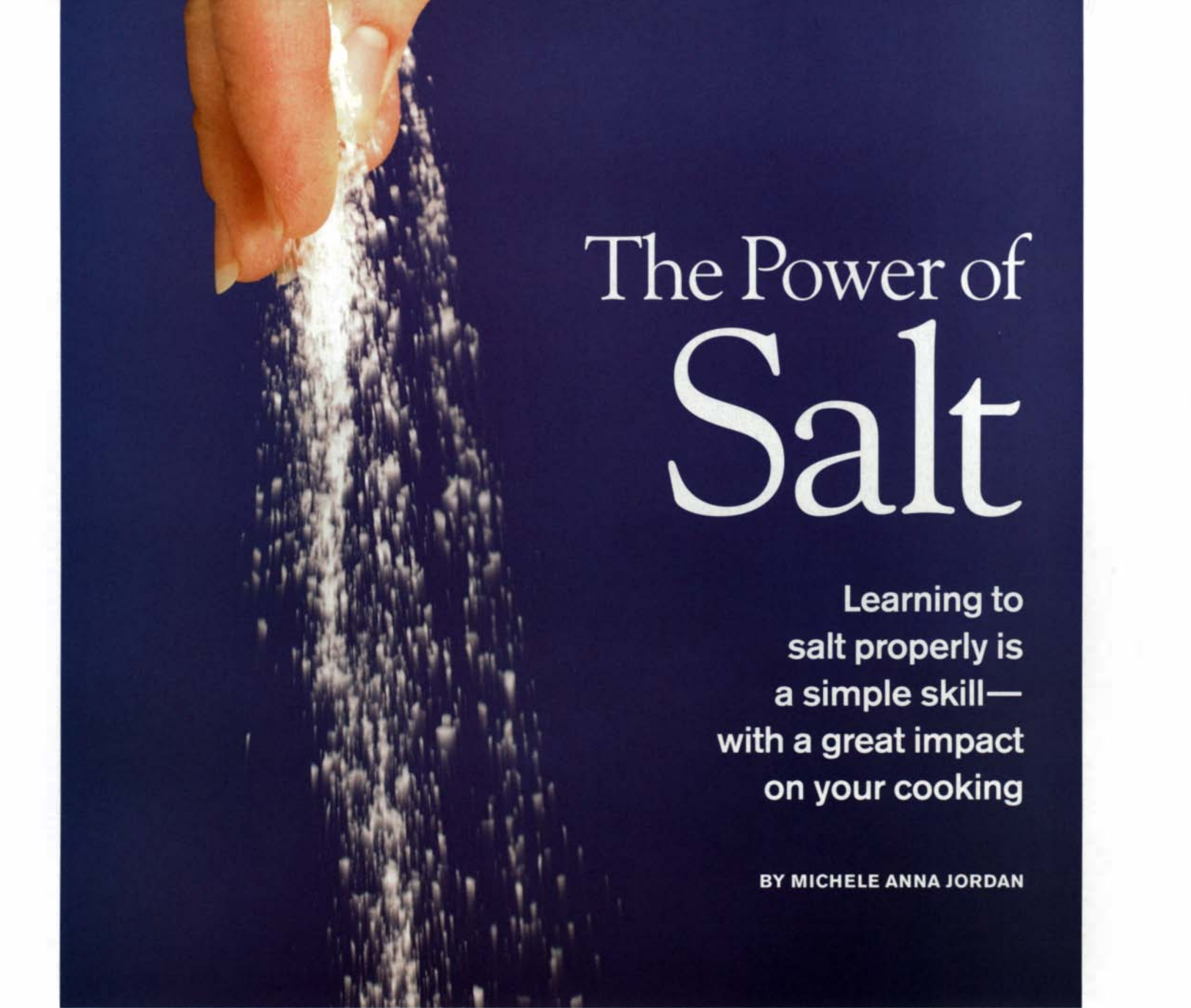
1 to 2 large bulbs garlic, about 3 oz. each, separated into cloves
1 to 2 cups extra-virgin olive oil, or grapeseed or canola oil

Put the cloves in a large bowl. Pour 2 cups hot tap water over the cloves and agitate with a wooden spoon or metal whisk for 1 min. to help loosen the cloves' skins. Drain off the water. Peel the skins off the garlic and cut off any tough stem ends.

Put the peeled garlic in a small pot. Add enough oil to completely cover the garlic, about 1¼ cups in a 6-inch pot. Set the pot over low to medium-low heat and bring to a simmer. The oil should remain at around 210°F (no higher than 220°F), hot enough so that the oil bubbles gently. If the oil gets too hot and the garlic appears to be frying or browning, remove the pot from the heat for 1 or 2 min. The garlic will turn almost fully translucent as it cooks. After about 35 min. of total cooking time, some of the translucency will begin to recede to a dull, opaque color and the cloves will be soft enough to easily split with a spoon. If the cloves are still firm, continue cooking gently until the garlic reaches this desired doneness. Remove the pot from the heat and let cool.

Transfer the cloves and oil into separate airtight containers. Store each in the refrigerator for up to a week.

Tony Rosenfeld is an assistant editor for Fine Cooking. ◆

A close-up photograph of a hand pouring salt into the air. The salt grains are captured in mid-air, creating a dense, cascading stream that falls towards the bottom of the frame. The background is a solid, deep navy blue, which makes the white salt grains stand out prominently. The lighting is soft, highlighting the texture of the salt and the skin of the hand.

The Power of Salt

Learning to
salt properly is
a simple skill—
with a great impact
on your cooking

BY MICHELE ANNA JORDAN

If you doubt the fundamental power of salt—its uncanny ability to make foods blossom into their full flavors—here's a little experiment for you. Pour two quarts of water into each of two pots. Add two teaspoons of salt to one, none to the other. Bring the water to a boil and cook a couple of ounces of spaghetti in both pots. Drain the pastas and taste. Notice a difference?

Pasta cooked without salt is dull and flat, not quite itself. No amount of salt added to a sauce or to the pasta after cooking will compensate. Pasta cooked in salted water tastes not of salt, but of wheat, coaxed into full flower by the mildly briny liquid. No one knows exactly how salt does this, how just a pinch boosts the flavor of almost everything, from simple, sliced tomatoes to complex sauces,

soups, stews, and even sweets. In the end, salt remains, like taste itself, mysterious.

Mastering the use of salt is arguably the most important skill a cook can develop. Whenever you taste a great chef's flawless dish you are, in part, savoring the results of proper salting. The best chefs add salt at each stage of preparation. They do so intuitively, holding their hands high above the food for even distribution, using their fingers to add a pinch here, a pinch there, and tasting all the while. The final step is to taste and correct the seasoning, that ubiquitous but essential instruction that ends countless recipes.

Learn to add salt at every stage of cooking

Fortunately, you don't have to become a professional chef to learn how to salt properly. It's merely a mat-

Where to salt— and when

Salad greens: Add salt and toss before dressing. When making a vinaigrette, add salt before whisking in the oil so it can dissolve in the vinegar; it also helps the vinegar emulsify with the oil.

Raw vegetables (tomatoes, radishes, fennel, etc.): Add salt just before serving.

Green vegetables (artichokes, asparagus, broccoli, etc.): Salt the water before blanching or boiling; if steaming, salt after cooking.

Onions, leeks, shallots, garlic: Add salt while sweating or sautéing.

Roasted or grilled vegetables: Add salt before cooking.

Boiled root vegetables, pasta, rice, and other grains: Salt the water before cooking.

Beans and other legumes: Soak in salted water, cook in salted water, and add salt to taste before serving. (It's a myth that salt toughens beans.)

Eggs: Add immediately before or during cooking.

Seafood, poultry, meat: In general, season with salt just before cooking.

For large roasts: Add salt just before cooking and season lightly after slicing.

For whole birds (roaster, broiler, turkey, etc.): Salt all over—inside the cavity, outside on the skin, under the skin where applicable, such as on the breast and thigh meat.

Homemade broth or stock: Salt broth and stock ingredients before sweating, sautéing, or roasting; add salt to the finished broth before straining but after reducing.

ter of habit, of learning to salt in stages. For example, if you're making a marinara sauce, salt the onions and garlic as they sauté in olive oil, and add a little more after stirring in the tomatoes. Just before you take the sauce off the heat, taste it. If it hasn't quite come together, add a pinch more salt. If you're adding a salty ingredient—such as capers or olives—add them before your final adjustment with salt. Just don't wait until a dish is ready to serve before adding the salt. Salt needs time to pull flavors together; otherwise, the dish will just taste salty.

Get some kosher salt and store it where you'll use it—next to the stove

If you've been sprinkling table salt from a shaker, you should stop. Stash the table salt in a back cupboard to use in emergencies, and get some kosher salt. Table salt, iodized or not, is sharp and one dimensional in taste. Sprinkled from a shaker, it's unwieldy and difficult for the cook to gauge. Conveniently, kosher salt is too coarse for a shaker. Store it in a wide bowl, a wooden box, or a ceramic salt pig and set it next to your stove. To use for general seasoning, pinch the coarse salt between your thumb, index finger, and middle finger, hold it high over your pan, and then rub your fingers back and forth to release the salt while circling your hand over the pan to distribute it evenly. For substituting kosher salt in recipes that call for table salt, see the box below left for simple conversion instructions.

When buying kosher salt, I recommend Diamond Crystal brand because its hollow flakes dissolve quickly (which is especially important in baking). Other brands of kosher salt have harder, slow-dissolving flakes.

Guests will want salt at the table, too, and so you should have a salt cellar—simply, a little open container of salt—at hand. A grinder is also an option, but don't expect freshly ground salt to taste better. Salt is a rock. Unlike black pepper, it isn't made up of essential oils, so its flavor doesn't deteriorate or dissipate if ground or left exposed. And don't take offense when someone adds salt to a dish that tastes perfect to you. The perception of salt is highly personal, based on the salt content of an individual's saliva.

Season meat and fish by sprinkling on salt— or by using a rub or a brine

Whether grilling, searing, sautéing, or broiling, add salt to seafood, poultry, and meat immediately before cooking. After turning, sprinkle on a little more. Some experts advise against salting meat before cooking, saying that salt will draw out moisture and result in dry meat, but experience says otherwise. Overcooking, not improper seasoning, is what dries out meat. For salt to have a drying effect—as it does

Conversion basics

Teaspoon for teaspoon, kosher salt contributes less salt to a dish than table salt simply due to its bulk—the larger flakes take up more volume. If a recipe calls for table salt, convert to kosher salt by multiplying by $1\frac{1}{4}$ times to $1\frac{1}{2}$ times, depending on the brand of kosher salt and how large the crystals are.

Table salt = Kosher salt
1 teaspoon $1\frac{1}{4}$ to $1\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoons



in a variety of preserved meats—it must be heavily applied and left to sit on the meat for days, or even weeks, depending on the cut. Salt penetrates meats at the rate of about one inch a week. The real problem with salting too far ahead is that it causes some moisture to bead up on the surface of the food, which would inhibit browning.

Salt is also used to add succulence and juiciness to meat, poultry, and fish through brining. Immersed in a brine solution of salt and water, the proteins in poultry or fish will unravel, freeing up space for some of the salty water to be absorbed and retained. With a dry brine, the salt is rubbed on and left to sit on the meat overnight. The salt rub draws moisture out to the skin, where the salt crystals dissolve into a mild brine. Eventually, this brine also becomes absorbed in the meat. Both dry and wet brines offer up the same benefits—a heightening of flavor and moistness.

When cooking beef and lamb, you can use salt to form a hard crust on the meat, which will also help it retain its juices. Prime rib prepared in this way is a classic dish. Many whole fish lend themselves to a similar preparation, although instead of applying a cloak of salt directly to the fish, as with prime rib, the fish is buried in salt. In such preparations, salt acts like a tiny oven rather than as a flavoring agent; inside, the fish retains its juices and flavors.

Can this oversalted dish be saved?

If a dish has too much salt, there are a few ways to rescue it. If you know instantly that you've added too much, don't stir it in. Grab a large spoon and lift out the salt. You can often remove nearly all of the unwanted salt in this way if you work quickly. More often, you'll find out a dish is too salty after tasting it. At this point, if the recipe calls for an acid—lemon juice, vinegar, wine, buttermilk—you can try adding a bit more to balance the salt. (Likewise, a dish with too much vinegar or other acid can be balanced by adding salt.) If salt still dominates, you might consider adding more liquid and other ingredients to dilute. Otherwise, you'll probably have to chalk it up to experience and begin again.

If all this salting seems like a lot, don't worry

When you add a little bit of salt in several stages, you actually end up using less salt than when you add it only at the table. And it's worth the small effort it takes to become adept at the process. A perfectly seasoned dish is one of life's simplest and most satisfying pleasures, thanks to the magic of salt.

Michele Anna Jordan wrote Salt & Pepper and The New Cook's Tour of Sonoma, as well as numerous other books. ♦

Seasoning with “specialty” salts

With so many salts now available—countless sea salts, flavored salts, salts from France, England, Wales, Italy, Portugal, Hawaii, India, Mexico—the marketplace can be confusing. Most artisan salts are primarily “condiment” salts, best used as a seasoning just before serving. Their flavor nuances and distinct colors and textures are apt to be lost when added during the cooking process; plus, they're a bit expensive to pour into the pasta pot. Here's a guide to some of the more commonly available ones and their best uses.

Fleur de sel: Delicate white salt from the northern Atlantic coast of France, harvested by skimming the top of the evaporating sea water in salt marshes. **Uses:** Sprinkle sparingly to finish simple seafood (pan-roasted salmon, seared scallops), rare lamb, pork tenderloin, seared foie gras, or simple summer tomato salads.

Sel gris: Hard, moist crystals with a tangy finish, harvested from the same salt pans as fleur de sel. **Uses:** Finish grilled or broiled steak and lamb, duck breast, roasted potatoes, grilled vegetables, and steamed, wilted, or sautéed greens such as chard and spinach.

Hawaiian alaea salt: Hard, pale-orange crystals with a silky texture, contributed by natural red clay. **Uses:** Finish roasted pork; crush slightly and sprinkle over grilled salmon, halibut, or snapper; sprinkle over potato or vegetable purées.

Black salt: Purple rock salt from India, often sold in powdered form. Its taste of sulfur is a classic element of many traditional Indian dishes. **Uses:** Season yogurt salads such as raitas; sprinkle over chickpea salads.

Korean sea salt: Hard, moist crystals similar to sel gris but less expensive. **Uses:** Its price makes it a good choice when large quantities are called for, such as for roasting fish in a salt crust.

Maldon sea salt: Hollow, pyramid-shaped crystals from the coast of England, similar to but slightly larger than Diamond Crystal brand kosher salt; delicate, briny, and fast-dissolving. **Uses:** Sprinkle on butter lettuce salads, other simple green salads, tomato and mozzarella salads, and cucumber salads.



Hazelnuts & Chocolate

Add an incredible flavor twist to chocolate mousse, profiteroles, and cookies with a hazelnut-chocolate blend called *gianduia*

BY CAROLE BLOOM

You may already love gianduia and not even know it. Are you a fan of Nutella, Perugina's Baci, Ferrero Roche, Toffifay? What do all of these sweet treats have in common? They all combine the flavors of chocolate and hazelnuts. And that's exactly what gianduia is—a blend of chocolate and hazelnuts. Part of what makes gianduia (pronounced zhahn-DOO-yah) special is that it's so unexpected; it looks just like ordinary chocolate, but the hazelnuts add a delicious, nutty depth to the flavor. Fortunately, gianduia isn't just limited to imported candies and sweet, creamy spreads. By making a simple hazelnut butter from scratch, you can create gianduia (and spectacular desserts) at home.

Homemade gianduia has deep flavor and a slight crunch

The term gianduia is a bit confusing because it means the actual chocolate product, but it also means the flavor combination, in the same way that "mocha" is the flavor combination of chocolate and coffee.

Commercially made gianduia chocolate is available in block form, just like unsweetened or bitter-sweet chocolate. Though it can be hard to find, it's been gaining popularity in recent years and is carried in some specialty markets and baking-supply stores that sell bulk chocolate (see Sources, p. 76).

But I've discovered a way to get the complex, toasty flavor of gianduia without having to special-

Homemade gianduia puts the focus on the nuts



Toasting the hazelnuts adds a rich flavor and pleasing crunch. It also makes their skins split so you can rub most of them off.



The hazelnut butter is simple to make—just a whirl in the food processor with a little oil to get things started.



Chocolate and cream make a smooth mixture called a ganache, which is the basis for homemade gianduia.



Two great flavors blend to create a third. The nuts give homemade gianduia a distinct texture, different from commercial gianduia, which is smooth.

Photos: Scott Phillips



Soften the filling before you spread it. The cookies may crack if you try to spread the giandua when it's stiff.



A cut-out shows off the chocolate center. Sandwich cookies taste best when the layers aren't too thick, so roll your wafers as thin as you can handle them— $\frac{1}{8}$ inch is good.

order it. I make my own version of giandua by making a hazelnut butter and blending it into a smooth chocolate and cream mixture, like a ganache. This hazelnut ganache is the basis for three of my favorite desserts: an easy-to-make, satisfyingly chocolatey mousse; buttery sandwich cookies spread with giandua; and profiteroles, light puffs of pastry filled with the mousse and drizzled with bittersweet chocolate sauce—an excellent dessert for a dinner party.

Giandua most commonly refers to a blend of milk chocolate and hazelnuts. Versions of giandua can be found made with almonds, dark chocolate, and even white chocolate. To give my giandua a bit more complexity, I like to use a mix of dark and milk chocolates, but you can make the recipes using just one type of chocolate (dark or milk) if that's what you have on hand.

To make the hazelnut butter, all you need is a food processor to grind the nuts (much like making homemade peanut butter) and a little patience, since peeling the hazelnuts can be tricky. I've read lots of techniques for removing the tight, papery skins from the nutmeats, but the method I find that works best is toasting the nuts in a 350°F oven for about 15 minutes, wrapping them in a towel for a few minutes to steam, and then rubbing them vigorously together in the towel to gently abrade the skins from the nuts.

You'll never get all the skins off, and that's okay. In these recipes, half-skinned nuts will work just fine (better half-skinned nuts than fully skinned ones

and a half-crazed baker). Keep in mind that hazelnuts, most of which come from the Willamette Valley in Oregon, aren't always available year-round in supermarkets; it's often hard to find them in the summer before the early fall harvest. (For mail-order sources, see p. 76.)

The hazelnut butter can be stored for months in the refrigerator, so it's a good idea to make a few batches and keep it on hand so that you can try all of the recipes here.

RECIPES

Hazelnut Butter

This butter can be refrigerated in a sealed container for up to three months or frozen for up to six months. If frozen, thaw it slowly in the refrigerator overnight. Always bring the hazelnut butter to room temperature before use. *Yields about 1 cup.*

8 oz. (1 $\frac{2}{3}$ cups) hazelnuts
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup vegetable oil, such as canola or sunflower

To prepare the hazelnuts—Heat the oven to 350°F. Spread the hazelnuts in a single layer on a baking sheet and toast in the heated oven until the skins are mostly split and the nuts are light golden brown and quite fragrant, 15 to 18 min. Don't overcook the nuts or they'll become bitter.

Put the warm hazelnuts in a clean dishtowel. Fold the towel around the hazelnuts and let them steam for at least 5 min. Then rub the nuts in the towel to

Folding gianduaia with whipped cream makes an easy mousse—to serve on its own or to fill profiteroles

remove most of the skins (try to get at least 50% of the skins off). Let the hazelnuts sit for another 10 to 15 min. to cool completely. Toasted, peeled hazelnuts can be cooled and frozen in a sealed plastic container for up to three months.

To make the hazelnut butter—Put the nuts in a food processor; add the oil and pulse a few times. Then process, checking the consistency every few seconds, until the texture resembles that of natural, unhomogenized peanut butter or wet sand, 1 to 2 min.

Quick truffles

Make a batch of the filling (at right) and let it chill until firm and shapeable, about 3 hours.

With a small spoon or a melon baller, scoop $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch balls and press or roll them between your palms to round them off. Sift some Dutch-processed cocoa powder in a shallow bowl, drop in a few truffles, and shake and roll them to coat.

Refrigerate the truffles immediately (don't let them touch one another) and keep cold until ready to serve.

Gianduaia Cookie & Truffle Filling

Use the best chocolate you can find, especially for truffles. For some mail-order sources, see p. 76.

Yields about 1 cup.

3 oz. bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, finely chopped

1 oz. milk chocolate, finely chopped

$\frac{1}{4}$ cup heavy cream

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup Hazelnut Butter (see the recipe on p. 69), at room temperature

In a metal bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water, melt the bittersweet (or semisweet) and milk chocolate, stirring frequently with a rubber spatula to ensure even melting. In a small saucepan, heat the cream over medium heat to just below the boiling point. Remove the bowl of chocolate from the pan of water and wipe the bottom and sides dry. Pour the cream into the chocolate and stir with the spatula until very smooth. Stir in the hazelnut butter until well blended. Cover tightly with plastic wrap. Cool to room temperature and refrigerate until thick but not stiff, about 2 hours, stirring occasionally with the spatula. If you make the filling in advance and it has become very firm, leave it at room temperature until it reaches a nice spreading consistency to use in cookies; to use for truffles, see the sidebar at left.

Gianduaia Sandwich Cookies

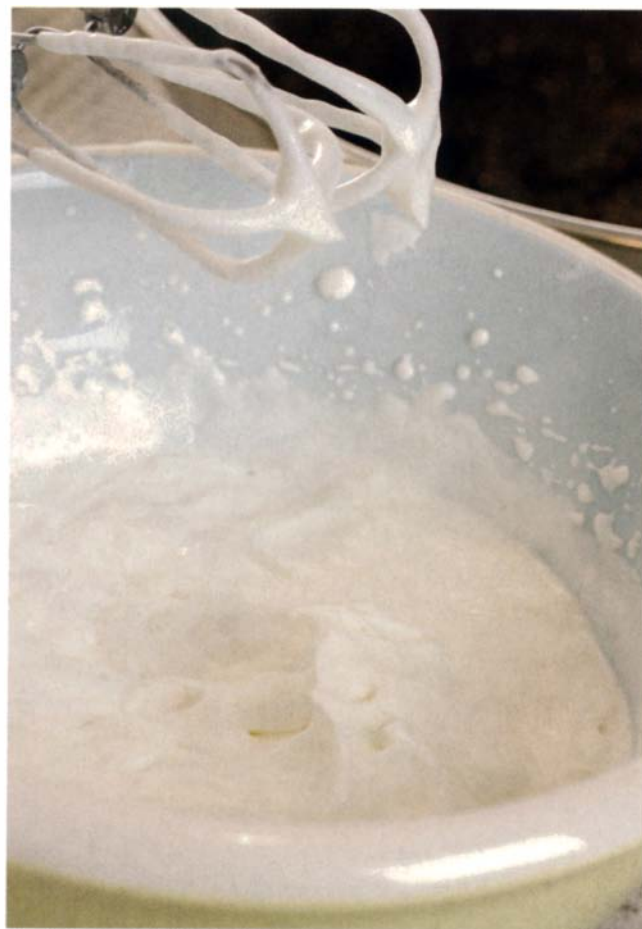
The wafers for these cookies are delicious served on their own as an accompaniment to the gianduaia mousse. See the Hazelnut Butter recipe on p. 69 for how to toast and skin the nuts. *Yields about 3 dozen 2-inch sandwich cookies.*

9 oz. (2 sticks plus 2 Tbs.) unsalted butter, softened

1 cup sugar

1 cup (5 oz.) toasted, skinned, and finely ground hazelnuts (grind the toasted nuts in a food processor)

4 large egg yolks, at room temperature



Strike a balance between volume and suppleness when whipping cream for the mousse. If it's too stiff, it will be hard to blend with the gianduaia, and the mousse won't have that ideal flowing, dollopy texture.

1 tsp. vanilla extract

$13\frac{1}{2}$ oz. (3 cups) all-purpose flour, mixed with a pinch of salt

1 recipe Gianduaia Cookie & Truffle Filling (at left)

In the bowl of a stand mixer using the paddle attachment (or in a large mixing bowl using a hand-held mixer), beat the butter until fluffy, about 2 min. Add the sugar and beat until well blended. Add the ground hazelnuts and mix well. Stop occasionally and scrape the sides and bottom of the bowl with a rubber spatula.

Add the egg yolks, one at a time, mixing thoroughly after each addition. Mix in the vanilla extract, and then add the flour in two or three batches, mixing to blend well, but don't overmix. Divide the dough, shape into two thick disks, wrap in plastic, and chill until firm, about 3 hours. (If the dough isn't thoroughly chilled, it will be too soft to roll out and cut.)

Adjust the oven racks to the upper and lower thirds of the oven and heat it to 375°F.

Line four baking sheets with parchment. Work with one disk at a time; leave the other in the refrigerator. Try to work in a cool area, not too close to the warm oven. Roll the dough between sheets of lightly floured waxed paper or parchment until it's about $\frac{1}{8}$ inch thick for sandwich cookies, $\frac{1}{4}$ inch for single cookies.



Gianduia Mousse

The hazelnut butter in this quick-to-make, creamy mousse adds a bit of texture that's a real palate pleaser. In addition to the serving suggestion below and the profiteroles to follow, try using this delicious mousse as a pie filling in your favorite graham cracker crust or tart crust; serve well chilled. This mousse is best when served within 6 hours of the time it's made. *Serves six.*

FOR THE MOUSSE:

6 oz. bittersweet or semisweet chocolate, finely chopped
1½ cups heavy cream
⅔ cup Hazelnut Butter (see the recipe on p. 69), at room temperature
2 tsp. vanilla extract

FOR THE GARNISH:

½ cup heavy cream
½ tsp. vanilla extract
2 Tbs. finely ground toasted hazelnuts (see the Hazelnut Butter recipe on p. 69 for toasting directions; grind the toasted nuts in a food processor)

To make the mousse—In a 2-qt. metal bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water, melt the chocolate, stirring with a rubber spatula until the chocolate is completely smooth. In a separate small saucepan, heat ½ cup of the cream over medium heat to just

A new take on an old favorite. The flavor and texture of the hazelnuts really gives this easy-to-make chocolate mousse some intrigue.

This mousse doesn't use egg whites to make it fluffy, so you need to preserve all the volume from the cream. A good rubber spatula and some patient folding will do the trick.

Cut out shapes using a cookie cutter. To make a "window" in the top cookie, in half of the shapes, cut out the center using a smaller cutter. Put the cookies on the lined baking sheets, leaving at least ½ inch between each wafer. Gently press the scraps together, reroll, and cut more wafers. If the dough is too warm and hard to work with, return it to the refrigerator to chill.

Bake two sheets at a time (keeping the others in the refrigerator) for 7 min. and then switch the sheets to the opposite racks. Bake for another 6 to 7 min., until deep golden on the top and the bottom. Keep a close eye on the baking time, and keep in mind that the cookie tops may be finished a minute earlier than the bottoms. Let cool on racks. The wafers must be cooled completely before assembling the cookies. The wafers can be baked up to two days before assembly and held at room temperature, tightly wrapped in aluminum foil or sealed in a plastic container.

To assemble—Use a small metal spatula or a table knife to spread some of the filling onto each wafer bottom. Place one of the wafer tops on top of the filling, pressing slightly so they stick together. Store the sandwich cookies at room temperature between layers of waxed paper, tightly covered with aluminum foil or in a plastic container, for up to three days.



Choux puffs make a crisp base for profiteroles

Choux pastry (pronounced SHOO) is a light, easy-to-make pastry that's the basis for cream puffs, éclairs, and the delicious dessert called profiteroles. The batter is quite forgiving—you can make it one day and bake the puffs the next, or you can fully bake the puffs, freeze them, and then reheat them quickly before filling with the giandua mousse (on p. 71), with plain pastry cream, or with ice cream. The puffs are delicate, however, so don't let them get squashed in the freezer. If you don't have a pastry bag, use a heavy zip-top bag with the corner snipped off.

Choux Pastry Puffs

Yields about 2½ dozen puffs.

½ cup water
2 oz. (4 Tbs.) unsalted butter, cut into pieces
1 Tbs. sugar
Pinch salt
2¼ oz. (½ cup) all-purpose flour
2 large eggs, at room temperature

FOR THE EGG WASH:

1 large egg yolk, at room temperature
1 tsp. milk

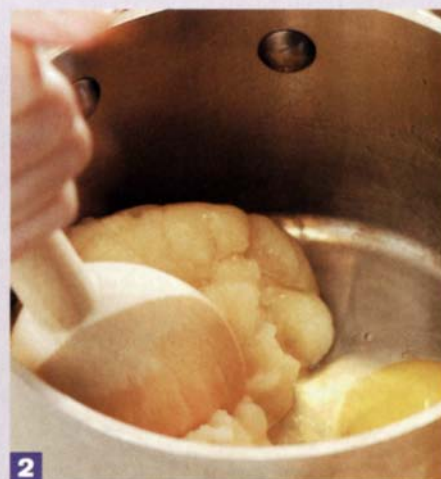
Position a rack in the center of the oven and heat the oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with kitchen parchment.

Follow the step-by-step instructions with the photos at right to make the batter and pipe the puffs.

Bake until the pastries are puffed and deep golden, 22 to 24 min. Let cool on a wire rack. If not using the same day, transfer to a plastic bag and freeze for up to four months; thaw in the refrigerator overnight before using.



1 In a small saucepan, combine the water, butter, sugar, and salt. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat. Add the flour and stir vigorously with a wooden spoon until smooth.



2 Remove from the heat and beat with a wooden spoon just until the steam stops rising, about 1 minute. The mixture will smooth out and pull away from the sides of the pan.



3 Add one egg and beat well with the wooden spoon. The batter will seem to break apart, but keep working until it becomes smooth.



4 Add the second egg and beat again until the mixture is completely smooth.



5 Scoop the batter into a pastry bag fitted with a ½-inch plain pastry tube (Ateco #5). Hold the bag about 1 inch above a parchment-lined baking sheet and pipe out mounds about 1 inch in diameter.



6 Beat the egg yolk with the milk to make an egg wash. Lightly brush the egg wash on top of each puff with a pastry brush, tapping down any points of dough.

Double Chocolate Sauce

Special desserts come together in a flash when you've got a batch of this killer chocolate sauce in your refrigerator. *Yields 1 cup.*

3 oz. bittersweet chocolate, finely chopped
1 oz. milk chocolate, finely chopped
½ cup heavy cream

In a metal bowl set over a saucepan of simmering water, melt the bittersweet and milk chocolate, stirring with a rubber spatula until the chocolate is completely melted. In a small saucepan, heat the cream over medium to just below the boiling point. Remove the bowl of chocolate from the pan of water and wipe the bottom and sides dry. Pour the hot cream into the melted chocolate and stir with the spatula until the sauce is cool, about 4 min. The sauce can be made up to two weeks ahead and stored in the refrigerator; before serving, warm the sauce in a metal bowl set over a pan of simmering water.

below the boiling point. Remove the bowl of chocolate from the pan of water and wipe the bottom and sides dry. Pour the hot cream into the melted chocolate and stir together with the spatula until well blended. Add the hazelnut butter and stir until well combined. Stir in the 2 tsp. vanilla.

In a chilled mixing bowl, using chilled beaters, beat the remaining 1 cup cream until it holds soft peaks. With a rubber spatula, fold the whipped cream into the chocolate mixture in four batches, blending thoroughly after each addition. Pour the mousse into a 1½-qt. soufflé dish or serving bowl, or into individual serving bowls or glasses. Cover with plastic wrap and refrigerate until set, at least 2 hours (or 1 hour if using it to fill profiteroles).

To make the garnish—In a chilled mixing bowl with chilled beaters, beat the ½ cup cream until frothy. Add the ½ tsp. vanilla and continue beating until the cream holds soft peaks. Pipe or spoon the whipped cream on top of the mousse. Sprinkle the chopped hazelnuts over the whipped cream and serve.

Giandua-Filled Profiteroles with Double Chocolate Sauce & Toasted Hazelnuts

A classic dessert is given a new spin with the addition of giandua. I like this best when the mousse is cold, the puffs are room temperature, and the sauce is warm. This recipe uses a bit less than a full recipe of Giandua Mousse, but don't worry about the leftovers: The extra mousse is delicious when eaten on its own, topped with a dollop of whipped cream. *Serves six.*

1 recipe Choux Pastry Puffs (see the opposite page)
1 recipe Giandua Mousse (see p. 71), chilled for about 1 hour
1 recipe Double Chocolate Sauce (see the box above), warmed
¼ cup coarsely chopped skinned, toasted hazelnuts



Use a sharp knife to cut each pastry puff in half horizontally, leaving a small hinge on one side if possible. Spoon or pipe 1 to 2 Tbs. of the giandua mousse into the pastry bottom—the exact amount of filling is a matter of preference, and you'll have plenty of extra. Close the top half of the puff over the filling.

Arrange five puffs per plate in a pyramid. Drizzle each serving with the warm sauce and sprinkle about ½ Tbs. of finely chopped hazelnuts over the top. Serve immediately.

Carole Bloom is the author of six cookbooks focusing on the arts of making desserts, pastries, and confections. Her latest is Cookies for Dummies. ♦

It's the chocolate sauce that makes the profiterole.

When warm sauce meets crisp pastry and cool mousse, you know why this French bistro-style dessert is so popular.

BY MOLLY STEVENS

Which cornmeal is which?

The corn used to make cornmeal, grits, and masa is not the same as our much-loved, supersweet summer corn on the cob. Instead, these meals are made from a very starchy variety, called field corn, that has been grown to full maturity and then dried. Once

dried, the corn is processed or ground in any number of ways.

Quite simply, cornmeal refers to any ground, dried corn. It may be white or yellow, depending on the type of corn used. With just slight differences in flavor, the two may be used interchangeably. Blue cornmeal also exists, but it's more of a specialty product.

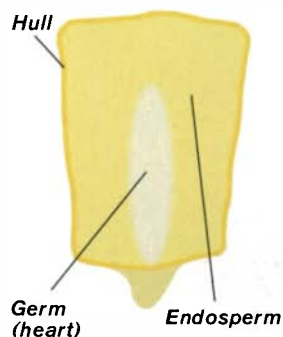
The most important distinction for cornmeal is whether it's **whole-grain** or

degerminated. Like wheat and other grains, corn kernels consist of three parts: the oil-rich and vitamin-packed germ or heart; the fibrous hull; and the starchy endosperm (see the illustration at left). Whole-grain cornmeal contains parts of all three and thus boasts a fuller, richer taste and twice the nutritional value of the other. But because the germ is high in oil, whole-grain cornmeal turns rancid quickly

if not stored in the freezer or refrigerator. For this reason, most supermarket shelves are stocked with degerminated cornmeal. Typically, this cornmeal is also hulled to create a finer texture.

Cornmeal also varies by the grind—fine, medium, and coarse—although product labels don't always make this distinction. Medium- and fine-grain meals are most often used in baking because the

Corn kernels consist of three parts



Yellow degerminated
(fine to medium grind)



Yellow whole-grain



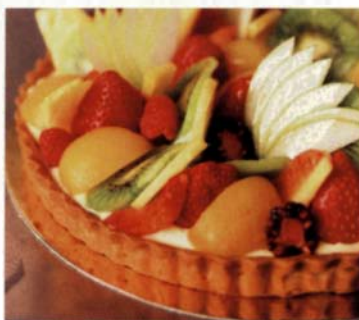
Yellow coarse-ground

Tart vs. galette

The words *tart* and *galette* identify similar types of sweet or savory pastry, yet there is a slight distinction between the two.

A tart consists of a shallow, straight-sided pastry that is filled before or after baking and has no top crust. Typically, tarts are formed in tart pans (many with the characteristic scalloped edge), but they may also be shaped directly on a baking sheet, often with the help of a frame or ring. Tarts may be round, rectangular, square, or miniature (also called a tartlet). While older cookbooks define *tart* as the French term for *pie*, today we make a distinction between the two, using *pie* to refer to a deeper-dish pastry with sloped sides and often, but not always, a top crust.

The term *galette* has a looser definition that is tied to the French word *galet*, meaning a smooth, flat pebble. Some



Tart



Galette

sources explain that the very earliest breads were indeed galettes—simple, unleavened breads made by smearing thick cereal paste on hot stones. By definition any flat, round pastry or cake-like creation constitutes a galette. This includes round, shortbread-like butter cookies, the thin buckwheat crêpes of Brittany, and something as simple as potato cakes.

Today, however, the term *galette* is used primarily to refer to rather rustic, free-form tarts made with a single crust of pastry or bread dough, like a pizza. If the filling is very moist, the sides of a galette may be folded up and over to contain the juices. Alternatively, the edges may be simply crimped and left rather flat. Italian cooks use the term *crostata* in place of *galette*.



White fine-ground



White stone-ground



Polenta



Masa harina

finer the grind of the meal, the lighter the texture of the confection. The tradeoff is a less apparent corn flavor. The coarsest grind is typically reserved for rustic puddings and polenta (although when I want to appreciate the full texture of the grain, I use coarse meal in cornbread).

You may also see cornmeal labeled **stone-ground**. This is whole-grain cornmeal that's been milled by traditional rather than modern methods. Modern, high-speed mills heat up the grain, deteriorating the taste and quality of the oily germ. So for more true corn flavor, look for stone-ground cornmeal (for sources, see p. 76). Some millers sift their stone-ground cornmeal to remove some of the hull and refine the texture.

It's still cornmeal, it's just called something else

There are several other products you'll see in stores that

are essentially still cornmeal but are labeled something else because of the way they're used. In essence, grits, polenta, and masa harina are all forms of cornmeal, though they're not typically used to make cornbread.

The term **polenta** is used to describe both the popular Italian dish of cornmeal mush as well as the cornmeal used to make the dish. While there's no specific cornmeal required to make polenta, most cooks prefer a medium or coarse grind, and packages of cornmeal labeled as polenta are usually coarser grinds. Instant polenta is made from cornmeal that's been hydrated and then dehydrated so that it cooks up in minutes.

Although the term **grits** comes from the British word for any coarsely ground grain, it has come to refer to a very coarse grind of cornmeal. Grits may be white or yellow,

Keep dried mushrooms on hand for extra flavor

I keep dried mushrooms in my pantry to use any time I want to add a deep, woodsy, mushroom flavor to soups, stews, rice, pastas, and other dishes. They're easier to use than you think—you just need to soak them to soften them up.

Reconstitute dried mushrooms in hot or tepid water depending on how much time you have. Pouring boiling water over the mushrooms plumps them up in no time (2 to 20 minutes—tender oyster mushrooms are the quickest; tougher shiitakes take longer). Or soak them overnight in room-temperature water. I prefer the latter method, as it leaves slightly more flavor in the mushroom and less in the soaking liquid.

In place of water, try soaking mushrooms in stock, Madeira, sherry, or Marsala, and then remember not to



throw away that flavorful "tea." Just decant it carefully, as there will be some sediment at the bottom. Then add the liquid to whatever you're cooking or save it for a soup.

Check the softened mushrooms by squeezing gently to see if there are any hard parts, which should be cut off. You'll have to remove the tough stems of shiitakes, for instance, no matter how long you soak them.

and are commonly made from **hominy**. Hominy is whole-kernel corn that has had both the germ and hull removed either chemically with picklinglime (calcium hydroxide) or mechanically through steaming. More flavorful whole-grain grits are harder to find but are available from a few mail-order sources (see p. 76).

Literally translated from Spanish as *dough flour*, **masa harina** is a very fine cornmeal made from hominy (called pozole in Mexico and in the Southwest). Masa harina is

traditionally stone-ground from the still wet, freshly ground hominy. This freshly ground paste, called masa, is used to make authentic corn tortillas. Because it spoils quickly, the masa is typically dried and then pounded into the longer-lasting masa harina, which is most commonly used as a thickener in soups and stews, such as chili con carne. It's also used in place of wheat flour in traditional Latin American kitchens.

Molly Stevens is a contributing editor to Fine Cooking. ♦



FLAVORINGS

If Hungarian Szeged paprika is unavailable at your local market, try **The German Marketplace** (888/684-7487; www.germanmarketplace.com) which sells 5-ounce tins for \$2.99. Another good paprika source is **Otto's Hungarian Import Store** (818/845-0433; <http://members.aol.com/HungImptrts>) where 10-ounce portions of Kalocsai paprika are \$4.95. **Tienda** (888/472-1022; www.tienda.com) sells Spanish pimentón, with 2.5-ounce tins for \$3.75, or three-packs (all three heat levels) for \$9.75.

KITCHEN DETAIL

The reversible pot lid holders are available at **The Container Store** (888/266-8246). The metal slide-out lid rack can be ordered from **Hold Everything** (800/421-2285).

ENJOYING WINE

To buy reasonably priced wine-glasses for a small tasting, contact **K&L Wine Merchants** (800/247-5987; 650/364-8544; www.klwines.com) or **Marjorie Lumm's** (800/806-0677; www.wineglassesltd.com), which both offer affordable products. For a large wine tasting, renting wine-glasses may be more efficient. Check your yellow pages for party rental operations. Also, check with local cooking schools for a wine expert to lead the tasting.

PIZZA DOUGH

Pizza peels make the task of transferring pizza in and out of the oven much easier. **Bridge Kitchenware** (212/688-4220; www.bridgekitchenware.com) sells basswood peels (\$14 to \$16). Baking stones

also aid in pizzamaking, helping to promote even cooking and a crisp crust. In its online catalog, **Kitchen Emporium** (888/858-7920; www.kitchenemporium.com) sells three sizes of Bravo baking stones from \$28 to \$37.

BLUE CHEESE

If you don't have a good cheese-monger in your area, mail-ordering cheeses may be your best option. Delivery is not always kind to cheese's delicate nature, though, so take care when selecting pur-



veyors. **Dibruno Brothers** (888/322/4337; www.dibruno.com) has an excellent selection of blue cheeses. One-pound wedges of Roquefort, Stilton, Maytag and Cabrales range from \$10 to \$16. Finding good Italian gorgonzola can be difficult. Stella Gorgonzola (8.99 per pound), a Dolce variety suitable for both cooking and eating, is available at **New York Italian Food Specialties** (800/440-1409; www.salami.com). **Formaggio Kitchen** (888/212-3224; www.formaggiokitchen.com), a importer of fine cheeses, sells Stilton as well as other lesser-known blues.

RECIPE CONTEST

For *verjus* (or verjuice), try the **Oakville Grocery** (800/973-6324; www.oakvillegrocery.com) which sells 32-ounce bottles of both red and white Napa Valley Fusion Verjus for \$12.75. **Haddouch Gourmet Imports** (866/445-5566; store.yahoo.com/haddouch)

sells preserved lemons. A 10-ounce jar is \$6.95.

LEMON BARS

Kitchen parchment can be ordered from **King Arthur Flour's Baker's Catalogue** (800/827-6836; www.kingarthurfLOUR.com). A half-pound roll of parchment is \$9; single sheets are available in 2¼-pound packs for \$15.

SALT

Zingerman's (888/636-8162; www.zingermans.com) carries an array of specialty salts, among them Maldon sea salt (250 grams, \$5). **Sur La Table** (800/243-0852; www.surlatable.com) sells Sea Star fleur de sel from Brittany (¾ pound, \$12.95) as well as many types of salt mills and shakers. With sea salts from France, Italy, Greece and the U.S., **Kalustyan's** (212/685-3451; www.kalustyan.com) has just about every salt you're looking for, including black salt (1 pound, \$6.99). **The Spice House** (414/272-0977; www.thespicehouse.com) sells Hawaiian Red Alae salt (4 ounces, \$11.99) among many others. Try **Diamond Crystal** on the web at www.diamondcrystal.com



(800/428-4244) if you have any problems finding its products in your area.

GIANDUIA

Giandua block chocolate is fun to experiment with. For a treat, substitute large broken-up chunks of giandua (break up the block yourself) for commercial chips in large or jumbo-sized cookies. Keep in mind that giandua chocolate is

much softer than semisweet or bittersweet chocolate, so it might melt more quickly and possibly scorch in smaller-size cookies.

To buy giandua, look for the Belgian chocolate producer Callebaut: **www.bakingshop.com** carries both dark and milk Callebaut gianduja (11-pound blocks for \$56 and \$58, respectively) as well as bittersweet and semisweet Callebaut chocolates (22 pounds for \$82.75), perfect for making truffles. **Qzina Specialty Foods** (800/563-4315; www.qzina.com) carries milk giandua (5½ pounds, \$27) as well as semisweet Callebaut chocolate (11 pounds, \$41).

The **Gnome Hazelnut Factory** (866/728-6887; www.gnomehazelnutfactory.com) sells hazelnuts roasted, unroasted, and in the shell. **King Arthur Flour's Baker's Catalogue** (800/827-6836; www.kingarthurfLOUR.com) sells skinned hazelnuts.

BASICS

For a wide array of organic cornmeal, try **Barry Farm** (419/228-4640; www.barryfarm.com) which sells both white and yellow corn grits as well as yellow and blue cornmeal. **Hoppin' John's** (800/828-4412; www.hoppinjohns.com) sells 2-pound cloth bags of stone-ground grits, cornmeal, and corn flour (\$5 each).

For dried mushrooms, try **Gourmet Mushroom and Mushroom Products** (800/789-9121; www.gmmushrooms.com). **Gateway Gourmet** (800/340-3270; www.gatewaygourmet.com) is another good site to shop for dried mushrooms.

ARTISAN FOODS

For more about nut oils, call **The California Press** at 707/944-0343 (www.californiapress.com). Also, **Dean & DeLuca** (877/826-9246; www.deandeluca.com) and the **Oakville Grocery** (800/973-6324; www.oakvillegrocery.com) carry California Press nut oils.

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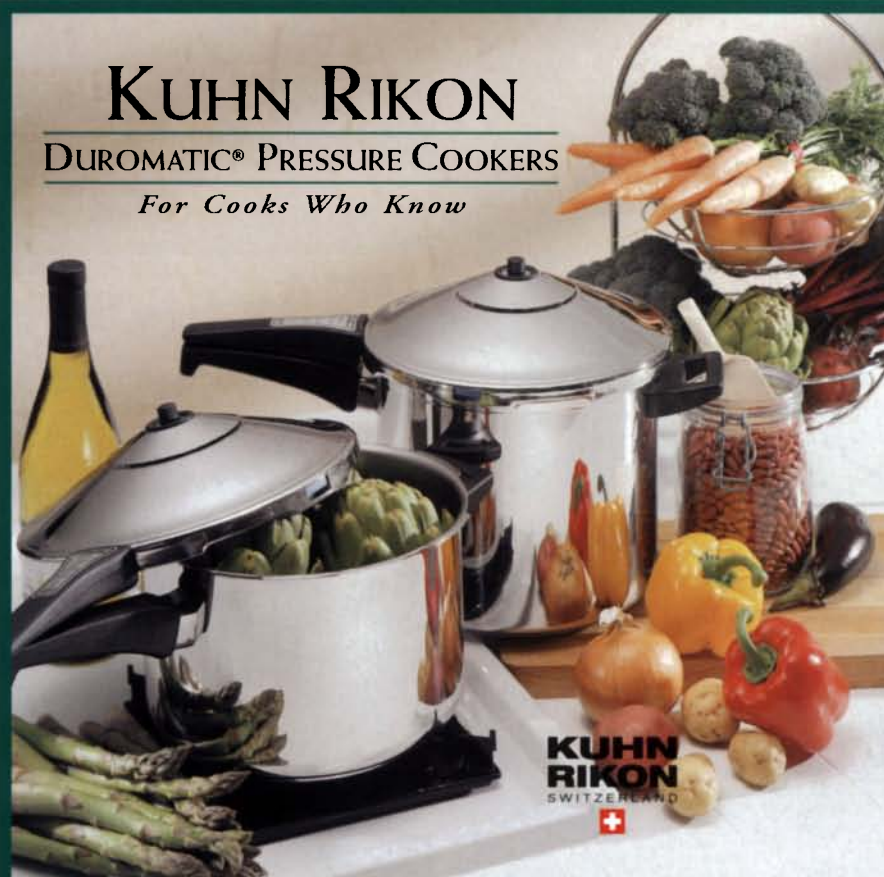
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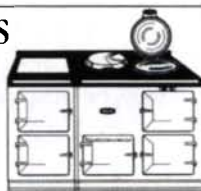
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NUTRITION INFORMATION

Looking for the index? It's bigger, better, and up front on page 6.

Recipe (analysis per serving)	Calories		Protein (g)	Carb (g)	Fats (g)				Chol (mg)	Sodium (mg)	Fiber (g)	Notes
	total	from fat			total	sat	mono	poly				
At the Market - page 18												
<i>Crisp Roasted Parsnips</i>	220	90	2	31	11	1	8	1	0	160	8	per serving
Pizza - pages 36-39												
<i>Easy Pizza Dough</i>	530	70	14	98	8	1	5	1	0	880	4	per 8-inch pizza
<i>Pizza al Caprino</i>	1,220	550	39	134	61	22	30	5	65	1,710	10	per 8-inch pizza
<i>Pizza Aglio e Olio</i>	680	210	17	99	23	4	16	2	5	1,960	4	per 8-inch pizza
Acorn Squash - pages 40-41												
<i>Maple Squash</i>	210	80	2	36	9	5	3	0	25	250	3	per ½ squash
<i>Brown Sugar Squash</i>	200	80	2	33	9	5	3	0	25	250	3	per ½ squash
<i>Apple Cider Squash</i>	200	80	2	32	9	5	3	0	25	250	3	per ½ squash
<i>Orange Curry Squash</i>	200	80	2	33	9	5	3	0	25	250	3	per ½ squash
<i>Parmesan Thyme Squash</i>	220	130	3	23	15	2	10	1	5	300	3	per ½ squash
Blue Cheese - pages 42-47												
<i>Quick Gorgonzola Pasta Sauce</i>	240	210	8	2	23	14	7	1	70	430	0	per ½ recipe
<i>Broiled Spiced Flank Steak</i>	740	470	65	4	52	18	21	9	185	620	2	per serving
<i>Stilton, Apple & Leek Tart</i>	320	200	10	22	22	13	6	1	120	730	2	per ¼ tart
<i>Asian Pear & Cabrales Salad</i>	340	220	10	16	25	8	5	10	30	790	4	per serving
<i>Buffalo Chicken Strips</i>	420	290	19	12	32	8	15	2	90	830	2	per appetizer portion
Recipe Contest - pages 48-52												
<i>Pot-Roasted Mediterranean Chicken</i>	830	510	56	19	56	12	33	9	210	1,690	4	per serving (with skin)
<i>Rustic Chicken w/Mushrooms</i>	860	430	62	40	48	18	21	7	230	1,830	3	per serving (with skin)
<i>Chicken Breasts w/Mushroom Stuffing</i>	310	160	34	4	18	7	7	2	105	700	1	per serving (with skin)
<i>Balsamic Vegetable-Stuffed Roasted Chicken</i>	680	370	56	21	41	14	18	7	230	1,700	4	per serving (with skin)
Lemon Bars - pages 53-55												
<i>Lemon Bars</i>	220	110	3	27	12	7	4	1	110	95	0	per bar
Braising - pages 56-61												
<i>Short Ribs Braised w/Rosemary & Garlic</i>	340	200	29	5	22	8	10	3	80	620	1	per serving
<i>Chicken Braised w/Preserved Lemons</i>	500	270	48	8	30	7	12	8	160	740	2	per serving
<i>Lamb Shanks Braised w/Tomatoes & Fennel</i>	220	80	26	8	9	2	3	2	80	400	2	per serving
<i>Pork Shoulder Braised w/Apple Cider</i>	440	180	44	13	20	6	9	4	145	490	2	per serving
Garlic - pages 62-64												
<i>Garlic Slow-Cooked in Oil</i>	15	5	0	2	0.5	0	0.5	0	0	0	0	per tablespoon
Gianduaia - pages 68-73												
<i>Hazelnut Butter</i>	120	110	2	2	12	1	8	2	0	0	1	per tablespoon
<i>Gianduaia Mousse</i>	630	530	7	26	59	24	26	7	110	35	3	per serving
<i>Gianduaia Sandwich Cookies</i>	180	110	2	16	12	5	5	1	40	5	1	per sandwich cookie
<i>Gianduaia Profiteroles</i>	970	760	13	50	85	38	35	9	265	125	4	per 5 puffs w/sauce
Quick & Delicious - page 82B												
<i>Quick Mac & Cheese</i>	300	100	10	40	11	7	3	1	25	240	1	per serving
<i>Pork Stir-Fry</i>	290	110	19	23	12	3	5	3	50	660	1	per serving
<i>Tomato Bisque & Cheese Toasts</i>	950	460	35	100	51	23	21	3	120	2,820	13	per serving
<i>White-Chocolate Mousse Parfaits</i>	320	210	3	28	23	13	7	1	65	180	1	per parfait
<i>Penne w/Artichokes & Feta</i>	660	330	20	64	37	15	16	4	55	1,080	7	per serving
<i>Pistachio Crusted Cod Fillets</i>	280	140	26	9	16	3	9	3	50	580	2	per serving
<i>Roasted Potato Planks</i>	170	90	2	18	10	1	8	1	0	860	2	per serving
<i>Turkey Chili</i>	310	80	27	34	9	1	2	5	55	1280	9	per serving

The nutritional analyses have been calculated by a registered dietitian at The Food Consulting Company of San Diego, California. When a

recipe gives a choice of ingredients, the first choice is the one used in the calculations. Optional ingredients and those listed without a

specific quantity are not included. When a range of ingredient amounts or servings is given, the smaller amount or portion is used.

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QUICK & DELICIOUS

BY ABIGAIL JOHNSON DODGE



Quick Mac & Cheese

Serves four to six as a side dish.

10 oz. dried rotelle (about 4 cups)
1 Tbs. plus $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. coarse salt
1 cup sour cream
 $\frac{3}{4}$ cup milk
1 Tbs. all-purpose flour
 $\frac{1}{3}$ cup grated Parmesan; more for garnish
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. freshly ground black pepper
2 Tbs. snipped chives; more for garnish (optional)

Bring a large pot of water to a boil over high heat. Once boiling, add the pasta and 1 Tbs. of the salt. Cook, stirring occasionally, until the pasta is just tender, about 8 min. or according to the package directions. Meanwhile, whisk the sour cream and milk together in a small bowl. Add the flour, stir until smooth, and set aside.

Drain the pasta and shake the colander to remove the excess water. Return the cooked pasta to the pot and pour in the sour cream mixture. Set the pot over medium-low heat and stir until the ingredients are well combined and the sauce is

thickened and coats the pasta, about 1 min. Toss in the cheese, the remaining $\frac{3}{4}$ tsp. salt, the pepper, and the chives (if using) and stir until well blended. Taste and adjust the seasonings if necessary. Garnish with more Parmesan and chives, if you like. Serve immediately.

Tips

◆ Depending on the size and shape of the pasta, volume measures and cooking times vary. Go with the weight measurement and adjust the cooking time accordingly.

◆ Whisking flour into sour cream keeps the cream from separating during cooking.

◆ Turn this into a main dish by adding steamed peas and diced ham or prosciutto.



Pork Stir-Fry

Serves four.

1 lb. pork tenderloin, cut in $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch chunks
3 Tbs. soy sauce
4 Tbs. medium-dry sherry
1 tsp. grated fresh ginger
1 tsp. minced garlic
 $\frac{1}{4}$ tsp. crushed red chile flakes; more to taste
4 medium scallions, cut into 1-inch pieces (including 4 inches of the green)
1 medium red bell pepper, coarsely chopped into 1-inch pieces
5 oz. mushrooms, thinly sliced
4 Tbs. peanut or canola oil
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup low-salt chicken broth or water
2 tsp. cornstarch
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste
 $\frac{1}{4}$ cup chopped fresh cilantro (optional)
Cooked rice, hot for serving

Toss the pork in a medium bowl with 2 Tbs. of the soy sauce, 2 Tbs. of the sherry, the ginger, the garlic, and the red chile flakes. Cover and set aside, tossing occasionally, while chopping the vegetables as directed above.

Heat a wok or a large skillet over medium-high heat. Add 2 Tbs. of the oil. When the oil is very hot but not smoking, toss in the vegetables. Cook, tossing constantly, until just tender, about 6 min.; scoop them out with a slotted spoon and pile onto a plate. Add the remaining 2 Tbs. oil to the wok and heat until very hot. Add the pork mixture and liquid and toss until the meat is lightly browned and just barely cooked through (it will cook more later), about 4 min.

Put the vegetables and any accumulated juices back into the wok and toss with the pork until hot, about 1 min. In a small bowl, whisk the broth, the remaining 1 Tbs. soy sauce and 2 Tbs. sherry, and the cornstarch until blended. Pour this into the pan and cook, stirring until the sauce is thickened and clear, about 2 min. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Garnish with the cilantro, if you like, and serve with hot rice.



Tomato Bisque & Cheese Toasts

Serves two.

FOR THE BISQUE:

2 Tbs. olive oil
1 small onion, diced
1 clove garlic, minced
3 hearty sprigs fresh thyme
1 can (28 oz.) crushed tomatoes in purée
1½ cups low-salt chicken broth
3 Tbs. honey
1½ tsp. coarse salt; more to taste
¼ tsp. finely ground black pepper; more to taste
½ cup heavy cream
2 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley (optional)

In a medium pot, heat the oil. Add the onion and cook over medium heat, stirring frequently, until tender and lightly browned on the edges, about 7 min. Add the garlic and thyme; stir until fragrant, about 1 min. Add the tomatoes, broth, honey, salt, and pepper. Bring to a boil over high heat. Reduce the heat and simmer, stirring frequently, until reduced by a quarter and thickened, about 15 min. Using a stand or immersion blender, purée about

half the soup; it will be still be chunky and thick. Return it to the pot and stir in the cream. Heat gently and adjust the seasonings. Ladle into bowls, sprinkle with the parsley if using, and serve immediately.

FOR THE TOASTS:

4 slices country bread, about ½ inch thick
1 Tbs. Dijon mustard
4 to 6 slices Gruyère
1 Tbs. grated Parmesan

Arrange an oven rack to the highest rung and heat the broiler on high. Line a baking sheet with foil. Put the bread on the foil and toast each side until golden brown. Spread the mustard evenly on one side of each toast, cover with the Gruyère, and sprinkle with the Parmesan. Slide the toasts back under the broiler and cook until bubbling and lightly browned on top, about 2 min. Cut each toast in half and serve immediately with the soup.



White-Chocolate Mousse Parfaits

Yields eight small parfaits (3 cups mousse).

4 oz. good-quality white chocolate, chopped
1½ cups heavy cream
¼ tsp. vanilla extract
Pinch salt
1 ripe mango, cut into small chunks
20 gingersnaps or chocolate wafers, crushed

Melt the white chocolate in a small, heatproof bowl over simmering water or in a microwave. Stir until smooth. Set the chocolate aside and proceed immediately; the chocolate needs to be very warm for this speedy recipe to succeed.

Pour the cream into a medium bowl and add the vanilla and salt. Beat with an electric mixer on medium-high speed until the cream forms firm but not stiff peaks, about 2 to 3 min. (Don't go too far or the cream will curdle when the chocolate is beaten in.) Scrape the very warm white chocolate into the cream. Continue beating on medium-high speed until well blended and firm, about

30 seconds. The mousse should form a dollop when dropped from a spoon.

To serve, spoon the mousse into tall glasses, alternating with layers of the mango chunks and crushed cookies.

Tips

- ◆ Be careful when you melt the white chocolate—it burns easily, so use very low heat.
- ◆ This mousse can also be served alongside a fresh fruit compote.
- ◆ Other combinations: fresh raspberries or quartered strawberries with crushed chocolate cookies; reconstituted dried apricots with gingersnaps; blueberries with vanilla wafers.



Penne with Artichokes & Feta

Serves four.

- 10 oz. dried penne rigate**
(about 3 cups)
- Coarse salt**
- 8 slices bacon**
- 1 small onion, thinly sliced**
(I use red)
- 1 package (9 oz.) frozen**
quartered artichoke
hearts, thawed, drained,
and cut in half
- 1 cup low-salt chicken broth**
- ⅓ cup pitted kalamata**
olives, roughly chopped
- 1 roasted red bell pepper,**
roughly chopped
- 4 oz. (¾ cup) crumbled feta**
cheese
- Freshly ground black pepper**
- 3 Tbs. chopped fresh flat-**
leaf parsley

Bring a large pot of water to a full boil and add the pasta and 1 Tbs. coarse salt. Cook until just tender, about 10 min. Drain and reserve.

While the pasta is cooking, heat a large skillet (not nonstick) over medium-low heat. Add the bacon and cook, turning occasionally, until browned and crisp, about 5 min. With tongs, transfer the bacon to a plate lined with paper towels. When cool, crumble into small pieces.

Add the sliced onion to the bacon drippings in the pan and cook over medium heat, stirring often, until wilted, about 3 min. Add the artichokes and cook, stirring occasionally, until the vegetables are tender and lightly browned on the edges, about another 4 min. Pour in the broth. Increase the heat to high and bring to a boil, scraping up all the browned bits in the pan. Boil for 30 seconds to reduce the liquid slightly. Reduce the heat to medium and add the drained pasta, olives, and red pepper. Toss until well blended and warmed. Remove the pan from the heat. Add the crumbled feta and salt and pepper to taste and give the pasta a few stirs. Cover and set aside, stirring occasionally, until the cheese melts a bit (but not completely) and the pasta is coated in creamy, clingy sauce, about 2 min. Taste and adjust the seasonings. Serve immediately with the crumbled bacon and chopped parsley.



Pistachio-Crusted Cod Fillets

Serves four.

- ½ cup unsalted shelled**
pistachios
- ⅓ cup fresh breadcrumbs**
- 2 Tbs. grated Parmesan**
- ½ tsp. coarse salt; more to**
taste
- ⅓ tsp. finely ground black**
pepper; more to taste
- 2 Tbs. olive oil**
- 4 cod fillets, preferably loin**
pieces (4 to 6 oz. each)
- 2 Tbs. Dijon mustard**

Heat the oven to 425°F. Line a small baking sheet with foil and lightly grease the foil (spray is fine).

Chop the pistachios into medium-fine pieces. Combine the nuts, breadcrumbs, Parmesan, salt, and pepper in a shallow bowl. Drizzle with the olive oil and toss with a fork until the crumbs are evenly moistened.

If using fillets with tapered ends, loosely fold the ends under to create a fillet of even thickness. Spread the top of each fillet evenly with the mustard. Press the mustard-coated side of each fillet into the crumb mixture to generously coat the fish. Set the fillets, coating side up, on the prepared pan. Sprinkle the

remaining crumb mixture over the fillets to form a thick coating.

Bake the fillets until the topping is crisp and browned and the fish is cooked through, 10 to 12 min., depending on thickness (see below for doneness test). Serve immediately.

Tips

♦ Whether using traditional or loin fillets, the doneness test is the same: The flakes will separate easily, and the fish will be opaque.

♦ Using other nuts: Stick with meaty, flavorful nuts, like walnuts or pecans.

♦ Steamed green beans and red potatoes or brown rice are great accompaniments.



Roasted Potato Planks with Rosemary & Lemon

Serves four.

3 medium Idaho potatoes
(about 1¼ lb. total)
3 Tbs. olive oil
1½ Tbs. Dijon mustard
1 Tbs. minced fresh
rosemary
2 tsp. finely grated lemon
zest
2 Tbs. fresh lemon juice
1½ tsp. coarse salt; more to
taste
¼ tsp. finely ground black
pepper

Heat the oven to 450°F. Slice the potatoes on a sharp angle into ¾-inch slabs. Put them in a colander and rinse (this way you rinse off dirt and lose a little starch for crisper planks). Shake off the excess water and spread them onto a heavy rimmed baking sheet (about 11x18 inches) lined with two layers of paper towels. Cover with a few more paper towels and let dry.

In a medium bowl, combine the olive oil, mustard, rosemary, lemon zest, lemon juice, salt, and pepper; stir until well blended. Dump the dried potato planks into the bowl (discard the paper towels); toss with a spatula until each piece is well

coated. Scrape the potatoes onto the same baking sheet and spread in a single layer. Drizzle any remaining herb mixture onto the potatoes.

Bake the planks until browned on the bottom, about 20 min., and then flip with a spatula. Continue cooking until they're well browned and tender, about another 15 min. Sprinkle with more salt, if you like, and serve immediately.

Tips

◆ Sweet potatoes may be substituted for half or all of the Idahos. Sweet potatoes cook faster than Idahos, so cut them a bit thicker, about ½ inch. That way, they'll roast at the same time as the Idahos.

◆ Potato slices soaking in water can be set aside for up to 24 hours. Drain and dry well with paper towels before proceeding with the recipe.



Turkey Chili

Yields 7 cups; serves four to six.

3 Tbs. vegetable oil
1 medium onion, chopped
1 small green bell pepper,
chopped
8 oz. button mushrooms
(about 10 medium-small)
2 cloves garlic
1 fresh jalapeño
2½ Tbs. chili powder
1 tsp. dried oregano
½ to ¼ tsp. cayenne; more
to taste
1½ tsp. coarse salt; more to
taste
Freshly ground black pepper
1 lb. ground turkey
1 can (29 oz.) tomato purée
1 can (14½ oz.) diced
tomatoes, drained
1 can (15½ oz.) small white
beans, rinsed and drained
1 to 2 tsp. balsamic vinegar

In a medium Dutch oven, heat the oil over medium heat. Add the chopped onion and bell pepper. Cook, stirring frequently, until they're just limp and some of the edges are browned, about 7 min.

Meanwhile, slice the mushrooms and mince the garlic cloves and jalapeño. When the onion mixture is ready, add the mushrooms and continue cooking, stir-

ring occasionally, until tender and light brown on the edges, about 5 min.

Add the garlic, jalapeño, chili powder, oregano, cayenne, salt, and pepper. Stir until well blended and fragrant, about 1 min. Loosely break apart the ground turkey and add it to the pot. Gently stir until slightly more separated (don't stir too much or the chili will be mealy) and coated with the other ingredients.

Stir in the tomato purée and diced tomatoes. Bring to a boil, reduce the heat to medium low or low and simmer, stirring frequently, until the sauce is slightly reduced and thickened, about 20 min. Stir in the drained white beans and the balsamic vinegar. Taste and add more cayenne, salt, and pepper or another 1 tsp. balsamic vinegar to taste. Serve immediately or let cool and refrigerate for up to two days. Garnish with sour cream, snipped chives, and shredded Cheddar cheese, if you like.